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CLAIRE VERNON



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THE ELUSIVE DOCTOR

by CLAIRE VERNON

CHAPTER ONE

THERE had been four girls originally waiting in that cool, impersonal hotel room. Now there was only Candy, still waiting to be interviewed. She sat, uncomfortably nervous, a slight girl with huge grey eyes half-hidden by the large ugly spectacles, her hand tugging nervously at her white gloves. Outside the hotel, the African sun was blazing down and it was hard to realise that, only a few days before, she had been in London and in the middle of a bitterly cold winter.

The door opened and Dr. Faulkner stood in the doorway, frowning a little as Candy got hastily to her feet. He towered above her, a heavily built man, handsome, with dark, deep-set eyes and a very pleasant voice. She followed him into the room, sat down as directed and folded her hands demurely in her lap as the tall man in the dark tropical-weight suit and grey silk tie took his place behind the desk. He was younger than she had first thought, probably in his mid-thirties, and was the headmaster of a co-educational school, and she hoped she was going to be his secretary.

He returned her curious gaze and she felt rather uncomfortable and, for once, lacked self-confidence. She felt unlike herself. Indeed, she *looked* very unlike herself!

When her mother had read out the advertisement for the job, she had chuckled and said: "A woman of dignified appearance, Candy. I'm sure he won't expect a flippant bit of a girl with a tip-tilted nose and such wild dark curls."

That was logic so Candy had carefully *disguised* herself. Now, as she nervously jerked the heavy horn-rimmed spectacles back up her small nose, she hoped he would not guess the lens were made of plain glass! She had bought them only that morning, and the demure navy-blue shantung suit as well for this occasion. She had disciplined her wild hair. At least she hoped so! She had brushed and strained it back firmly from her face and neck and twisted it into a small chignon on top of her head. In addition she had discarded her usual spindle-heeled shoes for sensible low-heeled ones, and hoped the white straw hat made a dignified crown to the whole outfit. She had thought she looked much older and more dignified but now as Dr. Faulkner studied her, she began to doubt it.

"I understand you have just come to Africa from England," he asked now in his deep attractive voice.

"Yes, my mother came out for . . ."

She stopped just in time! She had nearly betrayed the fact that she only wanted the job for six months! "She has come out to work here and . . . and brought me with her. We planned to take a flat in Durban but now she finds she has to move about between here, Johannesburg and Cape Town and so . . . so I am looking for a living-in post."

He offered her a cigarette and when she refused, said in a surprised voice: "You don't smoke?"

"Oh, yes, I do smoke," Candy admitted honestly. "But my mother says you should not smoke at an interview."

He coughed suddenly and it was a moment or two before he could

start asking questions again. "Your name is . . ." He was looking at the form she had completed.

"Candace White," Candy said quickly. No need to tell him that she had been called Candy since the day of her birth! "I worked for Professor Scrivener at the London University," she went on quickly. "For—for nearly two years. I have a reference . . ." She opened her handbag, confused, because she realised she should have pinned the reference to the application form.

"Don't bother," Dr. Faulkner said rather coolly.

He picked up the thick horn-rimmed glasses that lay on the desk and began twirling them. "You are very young . . ."

She had expected this. She lifted her chin. "I am nearly twenty-two. . . ."

Her cheeks burned with angry shame as she saw him glance at the application form and then glance at her, his eyebrows lifted. "I see that you are twenty-one years old and two weeks exactly . . ." he said very gently.

There was an endless—a terrible silence. "Yes, I am," she said very meekly. "But girls mature far earlier than men do, you know . . ." she added eagerly.

He spoke slowly. "My sister and I require a secretary to handle our voluminous correspondence, to deal with the ledgers and accounts, and also handle difficult parents. That is why we require an older, more sophisticated woman." He twirled his glasses and looked at her. "You would miss London."

"Perhaps but . . . but I love the country," she told him eagerly.

He smiled. "This is . . . well, this is much more than mere country, and it is very isolated. Why do you want the job so badly?"

She jerked her glasses back up her nose and leaned forward eagerly. "Because . . . because . . . you see, Mummy will be away lecturing all the time and I just hate the thought of going to the 'Y' and . . ."

"Your mother lectures?" he asked, showing little interest.

"Yes, she is Dr. Elisa White," Candy said and could not hide the pride in her voice. "She is a children's specialist and has been asked out here to lecture and teach her treatment for spastic children."

That interested him! He leaned forward, his face alight with interest. "Is she *the* Dr. Elisa White?" he asked.

Candy nodded and smiled. "Yes. She lectures all over the world. Everyone knows my mother," she said very proudly.

"I most certainly have heard of her," Dr. Faulkner said and she saw that he was impressed.

There was a sudden silence as he doodled on the handsome blotter before him. Then he looked up and began to talk about the school—that he and his sister ran it, that they had great plans for future developments. And then he said—oh, so casually:

"You would not have to work with the children, except perhaps escort a child to the dentist . . ."

He went on to talk about salaries, her time off, the holidays but Candy heard it from a great distance for she was tense with excitement and fear she had misunderstood him—in case she had read too much into casual words. But then he said—and this settled it. "You would work for my sister and myself but would eat with the staff and share their social life. . . ."

So it was true? She was getting the job! She felt limp with excitement and she heard the arrangements he was making for her as from a long distance. In four days' time, the school car would pick her up at the hotel.

Somehow she spoke lucidly, shook hands with him, left the room and floated along the hot crowded streets to the hotel; sat on the small balcony gazing at the incredibly blue sea as she waited impatiently until her mother arrived and then flung herself at the tall, white-haired woman with blue eyes and absurdly youthful face.

"I've got it, Mummy . . . I've got it."

Four days later, Candy was waiting in the hall of the hotel. Suddenly the pretty receptionist brought a tall dark girl to her and said: "You are Miss White?"

When Candy nodded, the receptionist left them and Candy stared at the dark-haired girl who was, in turn, staring back at her with a very odd expression on her face.

"But you can't possibly be *our* Miss White," the girl said slowly. "The new secretary?"

"I am—" Candy said, instantly on the defence. Then the girl smiled and Candy relaxed. "Why—who did you expect?" she asked nervously for she had hoped her green linen suit and the rather sober straw hat would impress the school for, as her mother had said, Candy must not *startle* them too soon.

The dark girl who had a dismayed look on her pretty plump face laughed uneasily. "It's just that you're so young," she said in a helpless sort of way and then, when Candy made a little grimace, hastily apologised. "I know how maddening it is to have things like that said about you," she added. "Who interviewed you? Not—surely not—Dr. Faulkner?"

"Yes, he did," Candy told her. "He did think at first that I might be too young," she confessed.

"But you convinced him that you are older than you look?" the girl asked in a rather dry voice. "Sooner you—or rather, sooner he than me . . ." she said and laughed uneasily and then smiled, a warm friendly smile. "Forgive me, I don't want to put you off. I am Nancy Boone, the Assistant Matron. The car is outside. Where is your luggage?"

Candy showed her and Nancy told one of the hotel porters to carry the cases outside and then led the way out into the brilliant sunshine to an enormous black car. The door was instantly opened by a very smart, white-coated African chauffeur and Nancy began to chatter right away in a friendly voice, telling her that she was frightfully—but frightfully—glad that Candy was joining the staff as she was the only young one—really young—there.

The miles flashed past as Candy listened and gradually built up a composite picture of the school, with many people who were very nice, and a few who were just the opposite.

"Our biggest bear," Nancy told her, "is Constance, of course. I mean Miss Faulkner—or the Duchess, as we call her. Not to her face, of course, though the doctor nearly did, one day." She laughed happily. "Not that it would have mattered if he had," she went on, more quietly, "for he can do no wrong. Most of us hate Constance but then maybe she can't help being as she is, poor thing. Frustrated and all that. She's single, of course and I can't see any man daring to marry her, or surviving if he did. . . ." She laughed and then looked at Candy worriedly. "Am I being horribly catty? I'm afraid so. I mustn't prejudice you against Constance. She can be quite charming when it suits her but she squeezes the last ounce of work out of everyone. Her last secretary had a nervous breakdown but of course that was largely due to Andrew . . ."

There was a sudden silence and Candy was glad of a chance to

look at the rolling mountains and the sweeping green slopes as she gazed out of the window. They had left the main tarmac road now and were followed by a great cloud of dust as they roared along the earth road.

"What did you think of Dr. Faulkner?" Nancy asked abruptly.

Startled, Candy turned and blinked for a moment, coming back from her thoughts. "I . . . I thought he was rather nice," she said slowly. "A bit young for a headmaster, surely?"

"I suppose he is . . ." Nancy said in a surprised voice.

It was a long pleasant journey and at one stage Nancy spoke about the children at the school. Candy had begun to have a very odd feeling that this was a school without children for neither Dr. Faulkner, nor Nancy until then, had said much about them.

"We have a few problem children," Nancy said. "Mostly those whose parents are divorced or trying to avoid it. I reckon our biggest problem is the Duchess . . ." She laughed gaily. "She is what we call a *bulldozer*. She wants everything *her* way and if you don't fall into line, it's just too bad, for *you*!" Nancy said and chuckled but she didn't sound very amused.

The little town of Nsingisi approached as they went down the steep winding hill-road and then they reached it and drove along the single street which was lined with buildings, all covered thickly with dust. There was a donkey and a cart . . . then a wagon with six oxen yoked . . . There were two big cars outside the only hotel. Several stores but they went too fast for her to see much in the windows.

"There's the Court House . . ." Nancy said, pointing to a straggling sort of tin-roofed building. "Every Saturday night, we have bioscope there. . . ."

Outside the tiny town, Nancy pointed out a thatched-roof house built on a koppie. "That's South African for a small hill," Nancy explained patiently. "That's where the doctor lives. He's most attractive and great fun but . . . well, a bit odd. No one knows why a man so young and so brilliant and with a good future prefers to bury himself in a dorp like this. He lives with his mother and she is a bit queer. . . . No one ever sees her, they never entertain and she never goes out and the natives are scared stiff of her, some say she is a white witch doctor . . ." Nancy's laugh rang out.

Now the scenery changed and Candy looked about with interest as they drove along a deep cool dark ravine that ran between towering mountains and then began to climb again . . . once more they were high up on a wind-swept plateau, the valley far below and behind them.

"There's something that's hard to credit—" Nancy said, pointing to a great white house they were passing. As they rushed by, Candy saw a swimming-pool, tennis courts, a great garden blazing with flowers, a huge lawn with tables with striped umbrellas, a wide terrace to the house. "Sam Covington lives there," Nancy told her. "He's a very eccentric millionaire and one of the school directors. He has a daughter but she is at some finishing school in Switzerland."

Now the car was swooping down into a valley again—but then by the side of crystal-clear waterfall, the road straightened again and suddenly Nancy cried excitedly—almost proudly: "There's the school. . . ."

Candy gazed up at the huge building and thought it far more beautiful than in the photograph she had seen of it. The great oaken door opened and an African girl stood there in a red dress with a crisply starched apron and a minute white cap perched on top of her dark hair.

Nancy spoke briefly to her and led the way into the lofty raftered hall and up the wide curving staircase. "I'll take you to your room first," she said over her shoulder.

Candy's room was small but very pleasant. Palest blue walls with rose-patterned chintz for curtains and matching divan cover. She walked straight to the window, catching her breath with sheer delight as she gazed at peak after peak of mountains, stretching away into the distance.

"I'll give you half an hour to wash and brush up and then I'll introduce you to Mrs. Combie," Nancy said. "And we'll have some tea before you have to meet Miss Faulkner." With a friendly grimace she closed the door.

Alone, Candy hastily unpacked, then washed carefully and brushed her hair vigorously—it was horribly thick with dust—and wished she could let it cluster in wild dark curls, for sweeping it up into a chignon was an awful fag but maybe she had better wear it this severe way for a while longer. Judging from Nancy's comments, Miss Faulkner was due for a nasty shock when she discovered how young her new secretary was!

It was a relief to get away from worried thoughts when Nancy came to fetch her and led her to Mrs. Combie's private sitting-room. Mrs. Combie, a plump woman with grey hair strained back very severely and wary eyes that betrayed surprise as Nancy introduced Candy.

Nancy burst out laughing. "She does look young, doesn't she, Mrs. Combie? I told you but you wouldn't believe me, would you? I can't think what Andrew was thinking of . . ."

Candy's smile felt as if it was nailed to her face. Then Mrs. Combie frowned meaningly at Nancy and turned to smile at Candy. "Welcome, Miss White. I certainly do hope you will be very happy here. . . ." and then she paused and as if the words were wrung out of her, as if she could not resist temptation, she added: "Dr. Faulkner *did* interview you?"

"Yes," Candy said and added, "You know, I am not so very young. I am twenty-one. I've worked for nearly two years as secretary to a professor at London University and . . ." Despite her efforts to hide it, she could hear her defiance and anger in her voice so she made herself smile again. "Nancy seems to think Miss Faulkner will feel I'm far too young."

"I'm quite sure she will," Mrs. Combie said a little grimly. "But what is done is done. I'm sure I don't understand why . . ." She paused and smiled at Candy. "There, childie," she said in a kind voice. "It's really too bad of us for scaring you like this. Miss Faulkner can be real nice when she likes and I'm sure if you work hard and do your best to please her, you'll have no cause for complaint—" Forthwith she changed the subject and asked Candy where she came from, about her parents but all in a very friendly way and in no wise resembling a cross-examination.

When they had had tea, Mrs. Combie took Candy downstairs to the hall and opened a door. "This will be your office," she said in a kind voice.

Candy looked round quickly and was glad to see it was a well-equipped room. Fortunately, too, she was familiar with the kind of typewriter, there were good steel filing cabinets, a proper adjustable chair, a big desk with plenty of drawers. The window, though small, gave a wonderful view of the garden and the drive to the front door so she would always be able to see in advance when visitors were arriving.

Mrs. Combie led the way to an inner door and knocked, standing

back as she looked down at the nervous face of the slight girl who kept pushing her glasses back on her nose, and smiled reassuringly. "You'll do . . ." she whispered. "I can always tell," she added with a quick encouraging pat on Candy's shoulder, left her.

When a deep voice told her to enter, Candy obeyed, hoping her nervousness didn't show on her face, that her hair would stay up and . . .

It seemed an enormous room and filled with bright sunshine—enormous arched windows with long impressive-looking cream and gold brocade curtains—a thick deep wine-red carpet—great bowls of blue flowers . . . all a vague impression and then she saw thankfully that a tall man was coming to meet her. A man she knew.

"Welcome to Mountain View School, Miss White," Dr. Faulkner said, taking her hand in his. He was even more handsome than she had remembered and his dark eyes glowed warmly as he smiled down at her. "I do hope you had a pleasant journey. Have you had some tea? Did Mrs. Combie look after you?" he asked in that deep vibrant voice she had admired before.

All her fears vanished. "Oh yes, thank you, it was really a lovely journey and Mrs. Combie gave me a most beautiful tea . . ." she said eagerly, her words rushing out.

A little cough distracted her attention and she saw a woman sitting behind a small elegant desk. Dr. Faulkner turned and led Candy toward her.

"This is Miss White, Constance," he said gravely, his smile vanishing.

Candy stared with a sinking heart into a pair of cold dark eyes; shrewd, thoughtful, disapproving eyes. Miss Faulkner was completely unlike her brother. She had none of his good looks, his warmth and friendly charm. She sat, very upright, her richly dark brown hair was coiled in neat pleats round her head, her face was beautifully made-up, her grey dress with the simple flashing diamond brooch was elegant but . . .

Involuntarily Candy shivered. Dr. Faulkner spoke again, this time his voice significant as he said: "You will remember that I told you that Miss White is the daughter of Dr. Elisa White, the famous child specialist."

"I remember," his sister said coldly. Then she smiled at Candy—a polite smile. "Welcome to Mountain View, Miss White, Please sit down for I wish to talk to you. I would prefer us to be alone, Andrew—" she said coldly to her brother.

Candy wondered at the strange expression on his face as he stared at his sister; she saw the little hesitation he failed to hide and then forgot it as he smiled at her brilliantly. "But of course, my dear Constance." He spoke as if amused by her but there was no amusement in his eyes as he looked at his sister. "Don't forget that Miss White is also my secretary, Constance. I can't allow you to monopolise her. I, too, have a pile of letters waiting for her attention."

"In good time," Constance Faulkner said coldly and waited until her brother had left the room then turned to look at Candy. "Are you really twenty-one?" she asked bluntly.

Candy blushed as she jerked her glasses back up on to the bridge of her nose. "Yes, I am, Miss Faulkner," she said very politely. "And I have had nearly two years' experience with . . ."

Miss Faulkner made an imperative movement with her right hand. "I am aware of that," she said a little curtly. "Now there are several things that you must understand about our life here. In the first place, you will work for my brother and myself and will have little to do with the children, and even less with the staff during working

hours. Naturally you must remain on friendly terms with them but in view of your extreme youth, I must warn you that we do not tolerate any kind of romantic liaison between members of the staff. You will be required to behave with dignity and discretion and if you do not conduct yourself in such a manner, we shall have to ask you to leave. Have I made myself clear?"

Candy's cheeks were flaming but she swallowed her indignation and merely said very quietly: "Quite clear. I understand perfectly."

"Good. We shall get on well so long as we understand one another," Miss Faulkner said, her voice softening a little. "Are you tired?" she asked abruptly.

Startled, Candy shook her head. "Not very. It was a pleasant journey and—"

"Then I wonder if you would type some letters for me right away? They were very urgent for in a few weeks' time the term starts. I am very behind as a result of my last secretary's behaviour . . ." Miss Faulkner's voice was tart as she rose, two angry flags of colour in her pale cheeks, and sailed—no other word for it, Candy thought as she followed—into the office and gave her a wire basket piled with letters, to each of which was attached a note. She showed Candy where the stationery was kept and said abruptly: "Leave the letters on my desk when you have finished them and I will sign them. In the morning I will tell you what your duties will be. Mrs. Combie will look after you this evening." She turned and left Candy.

Alone, Candy saw with relief that the notes were all written in a beautiful copper-plate handwriting and very easy to read. She took out paper, carbons and envelopes and got down to work and soon felt at ease, getting through the letters at a satisfactory speed.

She gave a little start of surprise when suddenly the door to the hall burst open and a man walked into the room. Hands pausing on the keys, Candy stared at him. He stared back. He was a young man, tall, too thin, with blond hair cut very short and hazel eyes which were very startled as he looked at her. He wore khaki shorts and a jacket and he carried an incongruous-looking black bag in his hand.

He pointed a long finger at her and said in a hushed voice: "Oh no . . ." He gave a little moan but she saw that his eyes were dancing with amusement. "Don't tell me that Andrew has gone quite mad and that you are the new secretary?" He whistled very softly. "Or has Connie gone off her head?"

Candy's face stiffened with anger as she said coldly: "I am the new secretary and I was engaged by Dr. Faulkner . . ." She was thoroughly tired of the incessant idiotic jokes about her youth! "And I am twenty-one," she added firmly.

The young man stared at her and his face seemed to crinkle with laughter. "I apologise . . ." he said in a trembling voice. "Humbly and with intent to make amends." His eyes were still twinkling. "You are twenty-one, experienced in clerical work and old enough to know what you are doing. I get it—and I won't forget it." He grinned at her. It was a rather attractive lop-sided sort of smile. "Honestly I am sorry . . ." he said, more gravely and she saw that he meant it.

"It's just that . . . Have you seen the Duchess yet?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"If you are referring to Miss Faulkner . . ." Candy began stiffly.

"Who else?" the young man asked. Then his voice became sober and a little anxious. "When did you arrive?"

Startled, Candy blurted out. "This . . . this afternoon."

He frowned at her. "And she's got you working already? Typical, of course. You must be whacked to the wide."

The sympathy in his voice thawed the resentment that still lingered despite his apology. "I didn't think I was tired . . ." she admitted slowly. "But I am . . ." She pushed her glasses back up on her nose and sighed.

"Look," he advised, "Pack up. She's not a bad old bird at heart. She'd be most upset if she knew you were tired and battling. Tomorrow is another day . . ."

She half-smiled and then glanced down at the pile of letters she had typed. "I've nearly finished and . . ."

"First impressions are so important, eh?" he finished for her quietly and with a friendly smile. "You know, you'd be much more comfortable if those spectacles of yours fitted properly. They keep slipping." Before she could stop him, he leaned toward her and took off the glasses, holding them up to the light. He whistled softly and gave them back to her. "Camouflage?" he asked.

She slipped them on quickly, giving them an impatient little jerk into place. "I wanted the job badly . . ." she said simply.

He gave her a warm smile. "I'll keep your secret," he promised, and somehow she knew he was a man who kept his word. He looked toward the inner door. "Is she in?"

"I'll see," Candy said and went to the door. "What name shall I say?" she asked, turning to smile at him.

"Bill . . ." He stood up and shrugged. "No, better say Dr. Abbott," he told her. "First impressions, you know," he added, smiling down at her, "I wouldn't want her to think we were on first name terms already. . . ." His eyes were twinkling as he came toward her. "But I hope we are. What's your name?"

"Candace . . ." she told him and knocked on the door.

She heard Miss Faulkner answer before the doctor had time to say anything so she opened the door quickly and Miss Faulkner looked up from her desk coldly.

"What is it?" There was an impatient note in her voice.

"Dr. Abbott," Candy began but the young doctor walked past her and Candy saw Miss Faulkner's face come to life: become warm, welcoming, almost beautiful.

As she closed the door, Candy heard the doctor say: "I hate to have to tell you, Constance, but . . ."

Back at her desk, Candy stared out of the window thoughtfully. So that was the odd doctor Nancy had told her about. . . .

At dinner that night—an ample, well-cooked meal which they ate in the staff-room—Candy met the Matron, a thin, grey-haired woman with a mouth like a nutcracker but, according to Nancy who was not given to praising people, a heart of gold. She, at least, did not comment on Candy's youth but merely remarked that she looked tired and that to someone unaccustomed to it, the altitude could be very tiring, and an early night might be a good idea. Candy heartily agreed and was glad to have a hot bath and crawl into bed.

She had been told her day's work would start at eight o'clock sharp so she was waiting in her office at ten minutes to the hour, trying not to feel nervous, constantly pushing her glasses back up on her nose, hoping her demure white and blue cotton frock would be dignified enough to please Miss Faulkner.

At exactly eight o'clock Miss Faulkner walked into the office and found Candy cleaning her typewriter.

She looked surprised. "Good morning. I trust you will continue to be as punctual," she said dryly.

Candy had planned a campaign of action. She was going to be the perfect secretary for she was determined to stay out her six months, so

she was not going to give Miss Faulkner a chance to find fault with her. "My mother says punctuality is one of the greatest virtues," she said now a little primly.

Miss Faulkner looked at her sharply but there was no mirth on Candy's face, not even in her eyes.

"Your mother is quite right," Miss Faulkner said a little grimly. "I also note that you can spell correctly and know something about punctuation. Thank you for getting through all the letters. I did not expect them all done."

"They were easy to do, Miss Faulkner," Candy said earnestly—and truthfully. "Your writing is so beautiful and easy to read."

Miss Faulkner frowned. "I prefer to dictate . . ."

Candy nodded. "Of course. I understand that in the circumstances . . ."

"I wonder if you do," Miss Faulkner said strangely and instantly began to show Candy the post book and where the stamps were kept; she told her that she had to keep the correspondence of Dr. Faulkner as well as her own up to date, take down telephone messages. "Intelligently. Always make sure you have the name correctly. Now I've some letters to dictate. When they are typed, enter them in the book and stamp them. Be careful about that, too, for the air mail letters are entered in a separate book. . . ."

Candy took her notebook and pencils—fortunately she had sharpened four in readiness—and sat demurely in a chair to take dictation.

Bent over her notebook, it was hard to hide her amusement for Miss Faulkner dictated at a terrific rate, so fast that at first Candy wondered if she could read her outlines back for it had been some time since she did any shorthand, and then, suddenly, Miss Faulkner seemed to weary of the effort to trip Candy up and her dictation grew slower and slower. Inside her, Candy was chuckling away madly. So it was to be a fight, was it?

"That will be all—for now," Miss Faulkner said curtly. "I'd like these typed right away." Even as she spoke the second door opened and her brother came in. He greeted Candy politely, barely looking at her, frowning as he saw the letters she was gathering up.

"Constance," he said and he sounded vexed. "You told me Miss White had got your correspondence up to date. Now why must you dictate more letters when you know I have a pile waiting . . ."

"My dear Andrew," Miss Faulkner said smoothly. "I waited until a quarter past eight but as you did not come through, I thought you must have other plans. Miss White shouldn't be long doing these and then she can attend to you." She turned to Candy. "Do you know your way to my brother's study?"

Candy stared at her. "No, Miss Faulkner. I hardly know my way around yet. Only the staff dining-room and . . ."

"Of course," Miss Faulkner snapped. Candy made a mental note that Miss Faulkner liked short, to-the-point answers. "When you have finished these and I have signed them and you have stamped and entered *all* the letters, ring the bell and Petrus will take you to my brother's study. Those few shouldn't take you long . . ." she finished, turned her back on Candy and began to speak to her brother quietly.

A little vexed, Candy retreated to her own office. Miss Faulkner certainly squeezed the last ounce of work out of her secretary. It was a fearsome pile of work, then the entries and the stamps . . .

It seemed hours before she had finished all the letters, had them signed, then stamped and entered them and it was with a sigh that she rang the bell and Petrus, a tall thin African with a high cheek-

boned face and soft husky voice, led her down the hall and along a corridor that obviously passed behind Miss Faulkner's room and finally led her to Dr. Faulkner's study.

Dr. Faulkner looked surprised to see her. Leapt to his feet and brought forward a chair. It was a big room, as big as his sister's but completely different. Not only was it a very masculine room but it was far more comfortable. The desk was enormous and her chair just the right shape and the light did not seem so glaring for the walls were panelled and there were heavy curtains, and the only flowers were a pot of flowering red fuschias.

"I didn't expect you for hours yet, Miss White," he said frankly. "I thought my sister had given you a pile of work."

Candy felt herself relax. In here, she was with a friend. "It was rather a lot," she confessed, "but luckily I type fast."

He became very business-like and her pencil flew over the pages. In the middle of a letter the point cracked and she apologised and even as she took a second pencil out of her pocket, he was leaning forward to offer her one.

He smiled. "Bright girl," he said approvingly. "You're the first secretary we've had who was prepared for any emergency."

Candy smiled back. "We were trained to be."

He dictated faster than Constance but well. She was thankful when at last he finished for her hand was quite cramped. The letters dated back a very long way, much further back than Miss Faulkner's letters. How was it he was so behind-hand? No wonder he had been vexed with his sister.

He towered above her as she collected the letters. "Tomorrow will do for these," he said curtly. "No hurry."

She opened her mouth and closed it again, taking the letters to her office and starting to type them, continuing after lunch, even though Nancy told her that as a rule, the secretary didn't have to type in the afternoon.

When the very last letter and envelope had been typed and put neatly in a wire basket, Candy sighed with relief and pulled her cover over the typewriter.

Dr. Faulkner looked startled when she gave him the letters. "My dear girl," he said in a slightly annoyed voice. "We are not slave drivers. There was no need to do them . . ."

She waited until he signed them. Her head ached and her back was stiff. "I know, sir," she said very politely. "But if I had left them to the morning, Miss Faulkner might have required my services."

He looked up at her quickly, as if startled by some note in her voice. "Well, thank you . . . anyway . . . They are very well done . . ." he said.

She took the tray. "Thank you, sir."

She had her hand on the door knob when he called: "Miss White . . ." As she turned to look at him, he asked: "Can you drive?"

A little startled, she told him that she could. "Mother has a car and I have my driving licence."

"Good—" he said, smiling at her. "I'll arrange for you to have a test out here for we may be glad to have you use the car. Often the chauffeur is engaged and you may be asked to go into Nsingisi for the mail or with a child. You would not mind?"

For a moment, she thought of the steep mountainous roads, the sharp bends, the sudden drops, the dark ravine, and then she smiled at him. "I should enjoy it," she said.

"Good." He smiled at her. "Good."

At dinner that night, Nancy introduced Candy to a short, dark, hand-

some man who limped toward them, his eyes bright with admiration. "This is our wolf . . ." Nancy said gaily. "Bob Robinson. He is supposed to teach art, but all he does is break 'carts. . . ." she rocked with laughter.

Bob Robinson's face turned a dull red. "Oh, shut up, Nancy," he said but his voice was good-tempered. "I've just had a lecture from the Duchess herself but how do I stop a teenager from falling for me? They mean no harm. They're bound to weave dreams at that age and I happen to be handy. What am I to do?" He smiled at Candy. "Let me guess—you're our new dancing teacher."

"Wrong—" Nancy shrieked, rocking with laughter. "She's the new secretary."

"You don't say . . ." Bob said in an awed voice. "How on earth did you sneak past the portals?"

"I was . . ." Candy began stiffly, her liking for him vanishing.

"Let me . . ." Nancy said quickly. She put her finger on her chin and looked very meek. "I am twenty-one, 'ave had two years' experience and was interviewed by Dr. Faulkner in Durban—" she said, mimicking Candy's voice perfectly.

"Nancy girl, go and get me a cold drink. I'm dying of thirst after all that dust . . ." Bob said quickly and when Nancy smiled at him and obediently trotted off, he turned to Candy, taking in every detail of the angry pretty little face that looked so small behind the enormous spectacles that she kept jerking into place. "Nancy's humour is somewhat heavy at times," he said gently. "You mustn't let it get you down."

She smiled at him gratefully. "I try not to but . . . but I can never see the joke. . . ."

At that moment a tall, well-built woman with beautifully waved, smoky-grey hair came into the room. Bob was on his feet instantly.

"Philippa . . . my dear Philippa . . ." he said, his voice warm and sincere. "Are you really well enough to come back?"

The middle-aged woman smiled at him. "Quite well, thank you, Bob." She looked at Candy and smiled. "You are Miss White? I am Miss Rowland," she said, holding out her hand in greeting.

"The Duchess' right hand," Bob said, pushing a chair forward for the new-comer. "What should we all do without you? Now, Philippa." He hitched his chair forward, his face alight with mischief. "Don't you think it rather strange that this nice little bit of sweetness should be the secretary?"

Miss Rowland smiled at Candy. "I do see what you mean, Bob, but I understand that we are very fortunate to have her. I am told she is the most efficient secretary we have ever had, that she can spell, type without error and is very quick."

Candy glowed with delight at the praise. "Whoever said that?"

Miss Rowland smiled at her. "Miss Faulkner herself, and believe me, that is high praise from her."

"I know it is," Candy said fervently, suddenly feeling very happy. She happened to turn her head at that moment and wondered vaguely why Bob was smiling but then Miss Rowland was asking her how much of the school she had seen.

"We mustn't overwork you, Miss White," she said in her gentle voice. "Miss Faulkner does not always realise the extent of her demands. What is your Christian name?"

Candy smiled at her. "Candace—" she said and waited for laughter.

"A very pretty name—" Miss Rowland began but Nancy returned at that moment with a glass of tomato juice for Bob.

She fell on Miss Rowland excitedly. "How lovely to see you—we

were so afraid you wouldn't be back this term." She smiled at Candy. "Isn't it lovely for me to have someone my own age? Her name is Candace but I call her Candy."

"Candy—" Bob said, a strange smile on his long thin face. "It suits you. Sugar and spice and all that's nice . . ."

Candy laughed and wondered why Nancy gave her a quick startled look and then Miss Rowland was saying: "Candace is a little long and rather old for you, my dear. So we'll call you Candy out of working hours, if that is all right?"

Candy smiled. "I'd feel happier," she said. "When someone says *Miss White*, I'm apt to look over my shoulder to see who they're talking to . . ."

Everyone laughed and Candy smiled at them all. How glad she was she had applied for this job!

Miss Rowland's arrival seemed to have touched a switch that set everything in motion for suddenly things began to happen. The staff began to arrive and Candy found herself doing all sorts of strange jobs and always, deftly, Miss Rowland seemed to intervene between Candy and Miss Faulkner's most excessive demands, and as a result, Candy really enjoyed her life.

Almost every day a fresh member of the staff turned up; a few of them were new, but all, of course, were new to Candy. There was Greta Stromberg, the massive blonde with huge biceps who taught German; a pretty dark-haired woman with large provocative eyes and very elegant clothes who taught French—these two largely ignored Candy and Nancy. Then there was Horace Hyde who taught history and English and was middle-aged with a small moustache and a kindly tact that kept the staff-room harmonious, and Malcolm Fenn, the Science Master, frail and with an ugly plainness that had a charm of its own, who spent most of his time hidden behind a newspaper but always thawed for Candy and would spend hours talking about London to her.

CHAPTER TWO

As the beginning of the term drew closer, Candy found herself with more work than ever, for now the different members of the staff brought her their schedules and lists; and there were typed timetables to do as well, often to be altered and re-typed. Everyone was most apologetic and grateful. In addition, Dr. Faulkner took Candy out in the car several times, making her familiar with the different type of gears, finally saying that she was ready for her test as soon as he could arrange for her to take one. In addition, more and more of the staff were arriving at the school and Candy found it hard to sort out their names for now the staff-room in the evenings seemed full of people, voices, laughter, smoke.

Two days before the term began, Dr. Faulkner told Candy that always before the term started, they had a social evening in Nsingisi. "We dine at the hotel and then dance," he said. "It gives the staff a chance to meet the local people and it is a sort of last fling before the hard work commences. Would you like to join us?"

Impulsively Candy clasped her hands. "I'd love to," she said eagerly.

Now Dr. Faulkner was looking at her in distress. "You have missed your gay life . . ." he said.

Candy coloured for in a way, it was true. It had been a lot of hard work and no fun up to date. "Oh no, I haven't," she said hastily, smiling at him. "There really hasn't been time and in London,

I'm not so very gay although I do go to dances and Mother and I go to all the shows in town but I'm not really gay."

He was smiling. "Well, I think we shall all benefit from an evening of relaxation, Miss White . . ." he said curtly and turned away. He had a habit of changing abruptly from being friendly to being almost off-hand. Now he turned and looked at her sternly: "You worked late again last night? I thought so. I had no idea you were working so late or so often. Next term we must make a different arrangement, get in a temporary typist to help you with some of the extra work. Miss Rowland tells me she is quite worried about it. I can only say I had no idea such a burden of work was being put on your shoulders and apologise . . ." he spoke jerkily, formally, but she saw that he was sincerely upset.

"Oh please, Dr. Faulkner," she said earnestly, jerking her glasses back into position, her eyes worried. "I've loved every moment of it. I knew that the extra work wouldn't be for always and . . ."

Dr. Faulkner smiled. "Well, if you won't let me apologise, I can at least thank you," he said and turned to a cupboard behind his desk, taking out a package, giving it to Candy with a shy smile. "I thought you might enjoy some chocolates . . ."

It was an enormous box with a gorgeous cover of blue silk, decorated by a silk rose. "Oh, it is lovely," she said, her eyes shining. "I'll think of you everytime I eat a chocolate," she promised.

He began to laugh. "So long as you don't think you are eating me," he said, "and develop a cannibalistic appetite."

Candy began to laugh as well when the door opened and Miss Faulkner appeared: "What is all the noise about . . .?" she asked fretfully, her face cold with displeasure.

Dr. Faulkner moved, deftly hiding Candy from his sister. "That will be all, Miss White," he said curtly over his shoulder and as he spoke to Miss Faulkner, Candy seized the chance to slip out of the room quickly.

Candy chose a simple scarlet frock with a tight bodice and a very full skirt for the party. She brushed out her curls—for once she would not wear them in a chignon—and tied a scarlet ribbon round her hair in Alice-in-Wonderland style.

Nancy stared at her in some dismay. "You look gorgeous but . . . but . . . most awfully young," she said worriedly and then laughed. "Not that it need worry you for you've got Andrew eating out of your hand."

Candy flushed. It was not a nice expression. "He isn't . . ."

"Isn't he . . .?" Nancy asked and someone banged on the door.

"Bob is waiting for you—" Matron called. Matron and Mrs. Combie had decided to stay at home, they preferred a quiet evening chatting together they said.

The hotel at Nsingisi was decorated with great branches of red blossoms, bowls of deep blue flowers. Drinks were handed round and Bob introduced Candy to some of the local people, all of whom Nancy knew, of course. Dr. Faulkner and his sister, Candy saw, were sitting with a group of local people, and although he gave Candy a polite smile there was no warmth in it and she had a strange feeling of being snubbed. Despite her efforts to be cheerful, she felt strangely depressed—as one does when a cloud suddenly obscures the sun on a warm day. After dinner, everything changed. Local young men came streaming in to the hotel and Bob introduced her to farmers, policemen, foresters, Civil Servants, who made a great fuss of Candy, dancing with her to the radiogram, giving her no time to sit and mope. She had left her glasses behind but no one com-

mented. As she danced, she saw that Miss Faulkner was talking most of the time to a big white-haired man Candy had met, a Colonel Grant, ex-policeman now farmer.

Candy was dancing with Danny, a lean farmer who kept cracking jokes as they danced past Miss Faulkner and both were struck by the anger on her face. They looked at one another and then at the object of Miss Faulkner's obvious wrath and Candy saw that it was directed at Dr. Faulkner who was dancing with a very glamorous-looking blonde, whose hair was piled high bouffant style, three rows of pearls round her throat; diamond ear-rings swinging, bracelets jangling on her wrists.

Candy's partner whistled softly. "That's Daphne—" he told Candy as he whirled her round. "Her child goes to your school. Poor little brat: . . ."

Candy looked into the sun-tanned face. "Because she goes to our school?"

He chuckled. "No, because she is a poor little brat. She's the child of Daphne Arden's first husband. Daphne has just divorced her second husband and there is some talk of her re-marrying. Local gossip has it that she is after Dr. Faulkner but that his sister will never allow it . . ." The music stopped and he led her out to the stoep, getting her a drink and then they sat on a sofa, gazing up at the enormous golden moon in the dark sky.

"Tell me—" Danny said, smiling at her, his voice mischievous. "It isn't true, is it, that Andrew engaged you in Durban? How did you escape being eaten alive by his sister?"

Candy stared at him in some dismay, for she thought that *joke* had been laid for ever.

Danny guessed at her discomfort and chuckled. "It's no secret that Constance is jealous and possessive and the last secretary . . ."

"Had a nervous breakdown," Candy said firmly, trying to think of a way to change the conversation.

"Is that their story?" Danny asked, chuckling. His voice changed, became grave. "I say, am I shocking you? You mustn't mind the way we gossip here. It's like living in a goldfish bowl. There is nothing to talk about but each other. It isn't as if we talked maliciously."

Candy stared at him, looking very young and innocent. "But how can you tell when it stops being fun and becomes malicious?" she asked.

He looked uncomfortable and changed the subject as a car arriving gave him the opportunity. "The tall thin man with a serious face is Anthony Tester," Danny told Candy. "He's a missionary out at Kubula." She looked at the earnest man who walked as if he were quite alone, his face thoughtful. Behind him came a quietly pretty girl with honey-coloured hair in a blue frock—she was almost running, her face eager as she hurried into the hotel. "That's his sister, Dene," Danny said in Candy's ear. "She's a nurse. Rumour has it that she'd like to marry the doctor but . . ." He went red as Candy turned to look at him. "Sorry—" he said and sounded uncomfortable. "I forgot you don't like gossip. Ah—there is Bill. . . ." he said, sounding relieved, standing up as Bill Abbott walked in.

He came straight to them, smiling down at Candy, shaking Danny by the hand. "Haven't seen you in years, old man. Hi—" he said to Candy, "Enjoying yourself?"

Danny laughed uneasily. "I'm either boring or shocking her. It seems Miss White doesn't approve of gossip."

Bill chuckled. "It's hard to avoid it here . . . Mind if I steal her for a dance, Danny?" He smiled at Candy. "Care to risk your life?" he asked, holding out his arms.

Candy was glad to escape from her companion and go back into the crowded room. He danced very well, holding her close, smiling at her flushed face and saying very gently. "They don't mean to be unkind. It's just a bad habit small communities get into—that of gossiping."

"I'm afraid I sounded like a prude . . ." Candy confessed, "but . . ." she spoke with sudden earnestness. "Gossip can be so cruel and . . . and it does seem such a tame excuse to say there is nothing else to talk about. There's books and plays and films and world events and . . ." She paused for breath. "In any case, why don't people mind their own business?"

He held her a little away from him and gazed down at her flushed face, frankly puzzled. "Why," he said slowly. "You are really upset."

She looked up into his good-looking concerned face. "Please tell me," she said very earnestly. "Why does everyone seem so surprised that I got the post of secretary? Why can't a young person be just as efficient as an older one?"

Bill whistled softly. "So that is what gets your goat! I didn't think you minded so much—" He looked into her grey eyes and then whirled round the room as he thought quickly. "You see, Candy—" he said as he slowed up again, "the last secretary made a fool of herself." He paused again as he saw Candy's frank surprise. "She was very young—" he went on. "And rather a romantic type . . . and she fell in love with Andrew Faulkner . . ."

Candy's face cleared miraculously. Now she understood! "Oh poor girl," she said at once. "Of course she had to go. Bill . . ." She flashed him a smile. "Thanks for telling me. It explains a lot of things. Funny, though, for he's old . . . I mean, he's not young and romantic and . . . He's different . . ."

The doctor studied the earnest face for a moment. "Is he different?" he asked dryly.

"Oh yes, quite, quite different, Bill," she said eagerly. "You see, although he can be very kind and thoughtful and very appreciative—he gave me some chocolates the other day for working late—but he is also very formal. I can't imagine him . . ." She gave Bill a swift friendly smile as she spoke: "Giving any girl reason to think he was in love with her. I mean, he's so dignified. . . ."

"I doubt if he did give her any reason," Bill said, his voice dry. "She was not the type of girl he would want to marry, and he is not the kind of man to . . ." Bill said with a quick charming grin, "philander, to use one of his sister's words. She was a romantic girl and wove dreams, that's all. Andrew is an impressive-looking man, but the pity is there need have been no gossip or talk at all if only . . . if only Constance had left well alone. As it was the poor girl had hysterics and landed up in hospital with a nervous breakdown. You see, Candy—this girl—Isobel Cartwright—was only twenty-three and everyone said that in future the Faulkners would choose an older woman, one not likely to be romantic . . ." he said, smiling down at her. "Maybe they think you are too young to be romantic . . ."

"Can one be too young?" she asked him as he whirled her round and round the room her feet hardly touching the floor.

The music stopped and breathless, she went with him to a chair. "Would you like a drink?" he asked.

"No thanks, I've just had one . . ." Candy told him.

He looked across the room and she saw that the nurse—Dene Tester—was waving to him, her face bright with happiness. Bill hesitated but Candy said quickly, with one of her swift bright smiles:

"I'll be all right, Bill—Your friend is waving to you . . ."

He grinned. "I know you'll be all right . . ." he said, for the music

was starting again. "You'll have a partner in two shakes. Be seeing you . . ." He lifted a hand in a farewell salute and strolled across the empty dance floor.

As Candy watched, she saw Dene come running to meet Bill Abbott, saw the way she held both his hands to greet him, then tucked her hand through his arm, smiling up at him and talking earnestly as they joined her brother. What was it Danny had said? That Dene wanted to marry Bill. . . .

A deep voice said formally: "May I have this dance?"

Candy turned her head and her heart seemed to do a most strange thing—as if it jerked. Dr. Faulkner was smiling down at her, his eyes warm and full of admiration. She stood up and went into his arms as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Candy moved stiffly round the floor in Dr. Faulkner's arms, dismayed and hurt for it was like dancing with a stick or a lamp-post. The whole experience had been like jumping into a warm pool and finding that it was filled with ice water. At last the music came to an end and it was a relief to move out of that stiff impersonal embrace.

Dr. Faulkner stared at her and blinked, as if seeing her for the first time. "Enjoying yourself?" he asked in a kind voice, such as one would use to a child.

Candy lifted her chin and smiled at him. "I'm having a lovely time, thank you," and they walked silently to her chair.

She was sure he was relieved as she was when Danny, the young farmer, hastened to her side, saying he wanted to introduce her to some friends of his. As she walked across the empty floor with Danny, she turned her head to watch Dr. Faulkner and saw that he went straight to the side of Mrs. Arden, the glamorous divorcée.

She looked up at the thin young man by her side and said frankly: "Danny, I'm sorry if I sounded horribly smug just now. I didn't mean to but Mummy has told me of so many cases where gossip got out of hand and ruined lives. . . ." She looked up at him earnestly: "Mummy is a perfectionist and I had no right to preach at you. . . ."

She was startled by the sweetness of his smile. "That's all right, Candy," he said at once. "You were quite right. It is horribly easy to slip into the habit of talking scandal and it can ruin lives. Bill is a case in point. No one knows quite what is the mystery about his mother but the talk is quite shocking and a nicer man than Bill never lived. . . ."

"I quite agree," Candy said and then she found herself being introduced to Dene Tester, the girl in the blue frock, and liked her instantly.

"How are you settling down?" Dene asked, making room for Candy to sit down next to her.

"I'm loving it," Candy said. "Though until school really starts, I can't honestly say."

Dene gave her a quick sympathetic smile. "I don't imagine you could work much harder. . . ."

Candy chuckled. "No—it has been a bit grim."

She was introduced to Anthony Tester who gave her a rather vague smile and said politely that he hoped one day she would come out and see the Mission. His eyes, deeply sunk in his gaunt face, glowed as he talked of it, he had a very small clinic, a school. Candy listened and found herself envying him for how wonderful it must be to know so plainly what you want to do with your life, and to have the courage to be able to do it.

After the party, came two days of sheer hard work with hardly a

moment to spare and Candy's fingers racing over the typewriter keys as she tried to keep pace with the work that poured in. It was a relief when one morning she awoke and knew the mad rush was over for that day, school began. There was little conversation at the breakfast table and Candy wondered when the children would start to arrive, but afterwards Miss Rowland asked her to be prepared for the onslaught of the parents any time after twelve o'clock.

"Relax until then, Miss White," she said in the formal voice she kept for working hours. "Walk round the garden and then come in and pretty yourself up . . ." She smiled at Candy. "We must make a good impression on the parents, you know."

Obediently Candy wandered round the lovely gardens and then strolled past the African quarters and paused to smile at the small African children, playing in the dust before the thatched mud huts. At ten to twelve, she changed into the navy-blue shantung suit she had worn when Dr. Faulkner had interviewed her, she brushed her hair back tidily and used a double lot of hairpins to make sure the chignon should not collapse, and then surveyed her face gravely in the mirror, pushing back the wretched spectacles that slid down her nose the whole time. At twelve-fifteen exactly, the first car arrived and, hovering in the background, Candy watched Dr. Faulkner walk down the wide steps to welcome the first child and his parents. Almost at once, another large car slid up and there was Miss Faulkner, regal in palest mauve, smiling graciously, extending a hand of welcome to the elegantly dressed couple who emerged, complete with two small, miserable-looking boys. Then another car and Miss Rowland was occupied and then a fourth . . . and Candy found herself going down the steps without any nervousness to smile at a tall plump girl who looked as if she had flung her uniform on in a furious temper and hated the world. Candy introduced herself to the harassed-looking mother and the father who looked really bad-tempered, and discovered the girl's name was Rosemary and that she hated school. It was not a very auspicious beginning for Candy too had hated boarding school for many reasons but when she sympathised, the girl looked as if she would burst into tears so that it was quite a relief when Miss Rowland took over with a firm: "Ah, Rosemary—the very girl I want to see. I want you to organise the play-readings this term. . . ." And Candy witnessed the miracle as Rosemary's miserable face blossomed into a beam of delight and her eyes glowed excitedly.

Gradually more and more cars arrived and departed, and the usually quiet garden and house seemed to be full of children of every age and appearance, with a lot of parents milling round, needing to be shown over the school.

Candy saw that she was no longer needed for now the rest of the staff were mingling with the throng, so she crept away to her office and sat by the window, in case some parents arrived and there was no one to receive them. Her head ached and she was appalled by the noise and excited voices and laughter which seemed to overflow as if the building could not hold all the children.

The door opened and Bill Abbott popped his head in. "Hi—" he said as usual. "You're the lucky one. Well out of it. I suppose the Duchess is dancing attendance on the bread tickets?"

Candy could not help smiling though she felt it rather a crude way of putting it. "I think they're giving some of them tea in their own house. Do you want to see her?"

Bill came into the room with his long easy stride and leaned against the window, staring out at the school bus that had just

arrived and from which was pouring a stream of noisy boys and girls. "Not particularly but I must, sometime," he said. "Got a headache?"

"I have—rather," she said, the abrupt question jerking the truth out of her.

He turned to smile at her, the sun glinting on his fair hair. "Then pack up and come for a run in the car. I have to go to the Mission," Bill suggested. "You won't be missed," he added, guessing the reason for her hesitation.

"I'd love to, but . . ." Candy said.

He grinned. "I know. Look, I'll ask Philippa. I know she'll say it is O.K. . . ." He disappeared through the door and she hastily finished the letter she was typing and put it in the wire basket.

Bill came back, beaming. "O.K. The Duchess is closeted in her house with the chosen few. Andrew is battling with a professor who knows how difficult children should be handled and Philippa says she envies you and no one will miss you. I'll bring you back in good time . . ." he promised.

It was heavenly to pull the cover over the typewriter, tidy up and go out in the warm fresh air with Bill. He had parked his car well away from the huge impressive-looking cars that stood in the drive, and in a moment, they were driving out of the gates.

Bill drove fast but well and she relaxed happily by his side, feeling the wind through the open windows tugging at her once-neat hair.

Without looking at her, he said: "Why not let your hair down for a change?" He chuckled at her face. "You'll lose your hairpins if you don't . . . and do take off those stupid glasses that make you look like an owl." He chuckled again. "And that was meant as a compliment for owls have always been my favourite birds, especially very young owls with enormous eyes like yours."

Candy smiled at him, obediently took out the hairpins and ruffled her hair, and then tucked her glasses in her pocket. "That's much better—" she admitted and let her head rest against the seat.

They had left the main road behind and were jolting over a very bad road, full of ruts and holes.

"Look—" Bill said abruptly.

She followed his pointing finger and saw the small buck at the side of the road, standing tense, on his face a look of fear as he stared at them, and then he had bounded away and out of sight in the bushes.

"How lovely—" Candy said, staring at the bush hopefully.

Bill nodded. "We often see them round here. Beautiful animals but a bit of a nightmare to the Mission for they come down at night and eat all the young vegetables. What did you think of Anthony?"

"I hardly spoke to him," Candy said slowly, she never liked giving spot-opinions of people. "He was very interesting . . ."

"He's a fanatic," Bill said curtly. "Not always wise—or fair. Now Dene is quite different."

"Is she?" Candy asked. Had his voice softened? "She seemed very nice and friendly but you know how it is at a dance . . . you just talk polite talk."

He smiled. "How right you are. No, Dene is a very lonely girl. Anthony's life satisfies him completely but I still think she should have stayed in a big hospital. After all, if Anthony hadn't got a sister . . ." He paused, negotiating an almost blind corner slowly. Far below them, Candy could see the valley, half-hidden in a mist haze. "Dene needs companionship, the spur of emergencies, the hum of a big establishment. Here she is wasted. She has stabbings and a few broken heads to deal with but never anything really dramatic—"

and Dene thrives on drama—" he said surprisingly, swinging the wheel of the car round sharply as they met another steep bend.

Candy stared at him in amazement. Drama was the last emotion she would have associated with Dene.

"Here we are . . ." he said and he sounded so glad that she realised he had been longing for this moment.

They slowed up as they reached a few thatched buildings with a fence built round them. African children played outside a few small mud huts and from somewhere a baby wailed. They were high above the valley and the wind blew almost blusteringly, whirling up the sand, making the few slender trees bend. The sky was very blue and the sunshine very bright, and Candy thought the colours of the blanket round the shoulders of a very thin, bent old African who came out of one of the buildings to stare at them, dazzling.

Bill blew a gay fandango on the car hooter and almost instantly from behind the old man Dene came hurrying, looking thinner than ever in a blue frock with a starched apron.

"Bill . . ." she cried gladly, and then something seemed to happen to her face as she saw Candy. In a moment, she had recovered and was smiling as she came forward to welcome Candy. "How lovely to see you."

Feeling a little uncomfortable, Candy got out of the car. Quite obviously Bill would have been more welcome had he been alone. She looked round her curiously.

"How lovely it is here," she said warmly.

"Oh, it's beautiful enough—" Dene said almost curtly. "Bill—" she turned eagerly to the doctor. "I'm so glad you've come for I'm really worried about Abner's broken leg. I still feel he should go to hospital . . ." She took Bill's arm and began to lead him away.

"Come on, Candy," Bill called. "Come and see Dene's hospital."

Candy hesitated for Dene's face had gone red.

"Call it a hospital!" she said bitterly. "I can only apologise for it, Candy, but what can you do when there is just no money available? How we would manage without Bill, I don't know," she said and smiled rather coldly at Candy. "Come if you like but don't be disappointed. . . ." she said almost reluctantly.

Candy was to see the small 'hospital' many times in the future but she never forgot her first impression of the dim cool building with the strong pervading smell of disinfectant. As she followed the others, she realised that both had already forgotten her. Candy stared at the number of small babies, either in makeshift cots of wooden boxes, many in their mothers' arms; there was a small African boy who stared at her with huge curious eyes and whose face was covered with running sores. There at the far end of the hut—she could see Bill and Dene standing at the bed on which lay an African, his leg splintered and hoisted in the air by a sort of Heath-Robinson type of harness.

Her first impression was of noise, babies crying, children quarrelling, the strong smell of disinfectant. . . . Then Bill came to her and took her on a 'tour of inspection', telling her that the many babies were there because they so easily got an infection of the eyes. "Luckily Dene has persuaded the mothers to bring them in before the witch doctors get at them," he said, his hand lightly on her arm.

An African in a huge night-shirt and with his head bandaged so that it looked like a great white turban was handing round mugs of some liquid.

"In a fight?" Candy asked, smiling at her companion.

Bill nodded. "And how. They have brawls when they get drunk.

The pity is that there is a good nourishing native beer that is perfectly suitable for them to drink but when they want to get an extra kick out of it, they add anything from fermented pineapples to methylated spirit." He laughed at her look of horror. "That's when the trouble starts. They go berserk—are blind drunk and haven't a clue as to what they are doing. Dene gets a lot of broken heads and stabbings as a result. I often say their heads are made of iron for they come up smiling and probably will be back in a few weeks' time with another bad head. Isn't that right, Dene?" He turned to smile at the girl waiting so patiently.

"Quite right, Bill," she said pleasantly but Candy recognised the note of repressed impatience in it.

"I'll leave you to your work—" Candy said lightly, smiling at them both, and going outside into the bright sunshine, drawing in deep breaths of the mountain-fresh wind.

At that moment, the gaunt body of Anthony Tester emerged from another building. "Ah—" he said and sounded pleased. "I am so glad to see you."

He sounded as if he meant it.

"Bill brought me," she explained. "He's in the . . . the hospital with Dene."

Anthony chuckled. "Thanks for the compliment of calling it a hospital. Dene does wonders with very little. The trouble is she gets so vexed with the Africans—she can't seem to realise that they are just children. . . ." He sighed a little and then smiled. "Like to see round the Mission?" he asked.

She was silent—and shocked—by the bareness of the little house into which he led her. Just sufficient furniture but no more. Shabby if comfortable chairs, a very old desk, bookshelves round the walls, filled with books that had obviously been read and re-read many times. The building was lofty with a raftered thatched roof, the walls were white. It was so very bare and clean and austere. Ideal perhaps for Anthony—but could Dene be happy here?

She stood at the window and stared admiringly at the peaks of mountains stretching away in the distance. "It is like being on top of the world," she said.

Anthony chuckled. "Dene calls it the back of beyond. It is very good of her to stay here with me for she hates every moment of it."

"Why does she stay?" Candy asked.

"I was very ill," Anthony said simply. Candy began to understand. "Dene says that if she is not here to bully me, I forget to eat." He smiled—an absurdly young smile. "To be honest, I'm afraid I do. There are so many other and far more important things to be done." He looked down at her. "Care to see the school?"

"I'd love to."

She found the school enchanting. A long narrow room packed with African children of every age. The hum of voices as they entered the building and the thin African woman with beautifully high cheek-bones and dark glowing eyes said something quickly and all the children, with a scraping of benches and shuffling of bare feet, stood up. Watching the missionary's face Candy saw the love on it as he told the children to sit down and then led Candy down the room.

"This is Miss Stella Dhlamini—" he said. "I don't know what we would do without her."

Candy held out her hand. "You've got a very big class . . ." The African girl shook hands and there was a strange look on her face. Candy glanced at the missionary, wondering if she had done something wrong and saw that he was beaming approval at her.

"They are so willing to learn . . ." the African girl said quietly. "That must make it very satisfying for you," Candy said. "I always thought one had to try to hammer knowledge into a child's reluctant brain," she added, laughing a little as she remembered the many conversations on the subject in the staff-room.

"Ah—" Stella Dhlamini said softly. "But you see, with us, it is different. When a thing's hard to obtain, you value it more."

Candy stared at her. "I suppose you do," she said thoughtfully.

"My sorrow is that no one here can play the piano—" Anthony said abruptly. "The children love to sing—and sing very well without music—but they love to hear the piano played. Sometimes a visitor . . ."

Candy turned to him, surprised. "I can play."

Anthony's face was bright. "How wonderful—" and in a moment Candy found herself sitting in front of an aged piano, staring at the yellow keys and wondering if she was quite mad. What would the children enjoy?

But Anthony had everything organised and was opening a hymnal. "Can you play from sight?" he asked anxiously.

Candy wanted to laugh. She rarely talked about it but she had nearly become a professional pianist. She had loved music, had worked hard, and then, at thirteen, had broken her hand. It had healed but had a habit of getting tired when she used it too much. As her fingers found the right keys, she went on smiling. It was such a very old piano and some of the keys went dead as you touched them, but she could hear the children's voices behind her, gloriously carolling and could see Anthony's happy face as he turned the pages for fresh hymns for her to play. She stopped when her hand began to ache. She sat there, rubbing it gently, and saw that Bill and Dene had joined them. Both were staring at her and Bill looked startled.

"I didn't know you were a pianist," he said.

She stood up, still gently massaging her hand, smiling at them, and told them of the career that might have been.

"Please don't feel sorry for me . . ." she added, laughing at them gaily. "It was a disappointment when I disappointed Mummy but I don't think I was really dedicated enough. You know, it's very hard work," she said. "I'm lazy. I play to enjoy myself."

"And to give pleasure to others," Anthony said warmly. "I do hope you will come again . . ."

"Of course I will," Candy promised. The children were all smiling at her. It was a wonderfully appreciative audience.

Outside in the sunshine, having said goodbye to Miss Dhlamini and the children, Bill kept glancing at his watch, but Anthony insisted on showing Candy the little church.

"I wish you could come to a service," he said wistfully.

Candy looked at his lean tired face. "I might be able to borrow one of the school cars," she said. "Dr. Faulkner wants me to pass my test so that I can drive for them and he might lend me a car . . ."

Anthony's face was illuminated. "That would be wonderful."

"We really must go—" Bill said impatiently.

As the car travelled the twisting mountainous roads, Candy battled with her hair. She must not go back to school looking too dishevelled."

"Anthony does look ill—" she said suddenly.

"He is ill," Bill said grimly. "But he won't admit it. That's why Dene won't leave him."

"I gathered that. It's rather wonderful of her," Candy said slowly, thinking of the bleak lonely life.

Bill still looked grim. "She is quite a girl," he said.

Candy looked at him again. So he was in love with Dene? Then was it Anthony who was the stumbling block?

They reached the school as the sun went down—a glowing orb in a sky of mother-of-pearl—palest rose, faintest streaks of green, warm glowing yellow. The mountains shimmered in the beauty.

"They are so lovely—" Candy said wistfully.

As they reached the front door, Candy was putting on her glasses. "Thank you, Bill," she said, turning to him with one of her warm impulsive movements. "I think they are both wonderful."

He smiled at her, watching her jerk her glasses into place. "We must do it again," he said and she wondered why he stared at her so strangely.

It was like being in a totally different world, Candy found as the days passed. A school empty and a school full of children were two different things. Now life ran to a strict schedule and always there was a background of voices, laughter, the clattering of shoes on the polished floors, the slamming of doors, the shouts from the playing fields.

She was typing one morning when Dr. Faulkner came into her office, looking quite incredibly handsome in his dark suit, white shirt and grey silk tie. "Can you be ready in ten minutes?" he asked curtly. "I am taking you into Nsingsi for your driving test."

Candy stood up hastily. "I will be ready, sir," she said meekly and hurried upstairs to her pleasant little bedroom, wondering why she felt so excited. She changed into a clean yellow-striped cotton frock, jerking her glasses up on her nose, brushing out her hair for it got less untidy in the car like that than when it was in its precarious chignon. She snatched up a blue cardigan, changed her shoes and hurried downstairs again.

Dr. Faulkner was sitting in the passenger seat of the car. He smiled when he saw her quick look of dismay. "I want you to drive in," he said. "It will give you confidence for your test."

She sat stiffly and tensely at first and then Dr. Faulkner began to talk to her, casually, slowly, asking her questions about books she had read, putting her—she realised later—at ease, for suddenly she found herself more relaxed, beginning to enjoy herself.

As they drove down the one main street of Nsingsi, Dr. Faulkner smiled at her and said. "I needn't wish you good luck with your test, Miss White. You don't need it," he said, flashing her a brilliant smile as he spoke.

Dr. Faulkner introduced Candy to Nick Bright, the giant of a man with blue eyes, very short white hair and a gruff voice.

"I'll see you at the hotel after your test, Miss White," Dr. Faulkner said and left her.

Candy eyed her companion a little nervously as she took her seat behind the wheel. He settled himself beside her and folded his arms, looking at her grimly.

"I'm prejudiced against women drivers," he said, "So it is not really fair that I should test you, but Dr. Faulkner particularly asked me to do so because he appears to have such faith in you." He looked even more disapproving. "Have you driven before—I mean, before you came out here?"

"Yes," she said and told him of her experience in England. "I was rather scared at first out here," she admitted. "I had never driven on such steep roads or such bad surfaces—" She flashed him a nervous smile. "But the more I drive here, the more confident I feel."

He nodded. "Just a matter of adjusting your ideas a little; to remember to change gears on corners and to use your gears as brakes

on the hills—also to avoid thick dust or sand, remembering that a dry skid can be as bad as a wet one. Well—” he said dismally. “Let’s get going . . .”

He gave her curt directions where she was to drive him and then followed the toughest half-hour of her driving life. He seemed to think of every difficult dodge there was, and sat all the time with that poker-face and cold eyes.

At the end of the test, he shook her hand.

“Congratulations,” he said and a smile creased his stern face. “For a woman driver, you are exceptional, for just a driver, excellent. Full marks, Miss White.” Suddenly his blue eyes were dancing. She stared at him a little mystified by the change in his attitude. As if guessing her thoughts, he added: “I’ll confess something, Miss White. I was sure a pretty girl like you would turn on the charm and try to make me pass you on that score . . .” He chuckled at her shocked look and his eyes twinkled again. “I assure you, Miss White, I have often experienced that. As I feel very strongly about the need for good drivers, it always angers me.”

“It never entered my head,” she said honestly.

He laughed. “I could see that— Now drive me back to the hotel.”

Dr. Faulkner was waiting on the stoep of the hotel, reading a newspaper. He looked up with a smile. “You passed, of course . . .”

Her cheeks glowing, eyes bright, Candy told him what Mr. Bright had said. “I wasn’t a bit nervous. It was a challenge.”

He smiled. “I knew you’d be all right . . .”

“I think it was your confidence in me that gave me the courage,” Candy said impulsively.

He chuckled. “You’re too modest. Look, shall we have some lunch, here?” He glanced at his wrist watch thoughtfully. “We could get back in time but it would be a rush . . .”

The pleasant unhurried meal was the perfect sequel to the exciting strain of the morning. Sitting alone with Dr. Faulkner at a small table in the corner of the dining-room, Candy forgot all about being dignified and ‘older’ and laughed and joked naturally, just as she would have done with Nancy and Bob. As they drank their coffee on the cool stoep, shaded from the sun by the thickly growing branches of the *bougainvillea*, she said nervously:

“I’m afraid I talk too much . . .”

Dr. Faulkner stretched out his long legs comfortably and turned to look at her, lifting his eyebrows slightly. “Please don’t apologise for what has been a pleasant interlude.” He smiled at her. “I get so tired of people being on their guard with me. I only wish we could do this more often, but it is a little difficult. . . .”

He drove back—for he said he expected she was tired. She was glad to relax by his side. It was a strange journey for he talked all the time. It was as if some gate had been unlatched and the words poured out. Sitting close to him because the rush of the wind as they raced along the narrow mountainous roads made it difficult to hear, she listened in amazement.

“My sister and I don’t always see eye to eye . . . Of course she is so much older . . .” The sentences seemed to be flung at her as he stared straight ahead. “A wonderful woman . . . difficult to understand . . . I owe her so much. . . . My parents died when I was four years old . . .” Candy stared at his beautiful hands as they rested on the steering wheel, masculine slender fingers with filbert-shaped nails. She tried to see him as a boy of four. . . . “My sister brought me up—sometimes is overpowering. I had a school of my own . . . don’t suppose you know that? It failed, of

course . . ." he said bitterly. "Too many ideals and not enough common sense. Then my sister asked me to help her. I didn't want to . . . don't believe in working with relations. . . ." He smiled ruefully down at the quiet girl by his side. "Trouble is, I owe her so much. This isn't my idea of how to run a school but of course, she is right. We can't afford to be philanthropists, can we?"

He slowed up as the car went down the steep hill toward the cement causeway over the river. "Am I boring you?" he asked.

"Of course you're not . . ." Candy said, turning to him eagerly. "I . . ."

He was not listening. He seemed to be talking to himself. "It is so wonderful to be able to relax. To be myself. Just to talk to someone who understands," he said and his voice sounded quite wistful.

He talked all the way back to the school; talked of his troubles with the staff, of his need to keep his sister happy and yet put right some of the small things with which he strongly disagreed; of the difficulties of children with broken homes. As they reached the school gates and paused for them to be opened, he turned to Candy with a smile.

"I've been waiting for the opportunity to say this—why not throw away those stupid glasses?" he said surprisingly.

Candy's hand flew to her mouth in dismay. "But . . . but . . ."

He chuckled as he drove slowly down the drive. "My dear girl, they never fooled me for one moment. You wore them to get the job? I thought so." He chuckled again. "It wasn't the glasses that got you the job. They make you look younger, if anything, and very vulnerable. Besides it is most irritating to watch you constantly push the wretched things up on your nose all the time." The car drew up outside the school and he turned sideways in the seat to smile at her. "Throw them away. Constance will never notice. She is most unobservant and so long as you do your job as well as you do it now . . ." He smiled again. "And let your hair hang loose like this . . ." He touched her soft dark curls lightly, an odd expression in his eyes. "It's much prettier this way. . . ."

Somehow, Candy got to her bedroom and stood in front of the mirror, staring in amazement at the reflection of the pretty girl with starry eyes and flushed cheeks, whose dark curls were wind-blown into glorious confusion.

"It's much prettier this way . . ." He had said that. He had said he wished they could have lunch together more often. He had said . . .

It was a few days later that Dr. Faulkner approached Candy and asked rather apologetically if she would have time to sort his coloured slides and put them in their correct files.

"I usually show them to the school each term and I'm afraid they got somewhat muddled at the last lecture . . ." he said, pausing at her desk.

"I'll be glad to—" she said eagerly, smiling up at him, her hands poised over the typewriter keys.

She enjoyed her afternoon's work in Dr. Faulkner's study. It was quiet and cool and everything was ready for her. There was a small projector into which she put the slides to see what category they came under.

Dr. Faulkner walked into the room just as she was tidying up. "Have you finished them?" he said, sounding surprised.

Candy looked up with her quick eager smile. "Oh yes, and I did enjoy doing it. I do hope you will give a lecture this term on the wild animals. Where does one see them? I know there are monkeys in the trees by the river but . . ."

Something of Dr. Faulkner's tired look vanished. "They were taken in the Game Reserves. You've never been to one? Of course not, how could you . . ." He paused, frowning thoughtfully. Then he looked up and his face was suddenly bright. "I—I'm taking some of the children to the Reserve this term." He stared at Candy, his eyes narrowing thoughtfully. "I wonder . . . if I could so arrange it, would you like to come with us?"

Candy clasped her hands together, staring at him grey eyes wide. "Oh, Dr. Faulkner, if only I could . . ." she said eagerly. "Oh, it would be too wonderful for words. Do you really see lions and . . . and elephants and . . . and things just walking about . . .?"

He chuckled. "Especially *and things*," he said. "Their camouflage is so good, that they are quite hard to find at times. It isn't a very good season for going to the Game Reserves but we should still see plenty of wild animals. I'll see what can be arranged."

Candy's eyes shone with excitement. "It would be wonderful."

He stared down at her. "Don't talk about it—yet," he said and it seemed to her that he lost his natural friendliness and retreated into his old former self. "Thank you for doing the slides for me," he added almost curtly.

Murmuring a polite rejoinder, Candy slipped out of the room, wondering what she could have said to make him change like that. One moment, so easy and relaxed—the next stiff and formal.

CHAPTER THREE

As great black clouds massed in the sky, with every now and then a jagged zigzag flash of lightning piercing the blackness, Candy constantly gazed out of the windows apprehensively for, though she hated to admit it, she was terrified of thunder storms.

"You'll get used to them here," Nancy said cheerfully. "We've been lucky so far but we are due for a spell of storms and rain."

Candy's life at the school had settled into a regular, not unpleasant rhythm now, and often she had to drive into Nsingsi and enjoyed doing it. She also went the rounds with Nancy in the evenings and gradually got to know some of the children. Molly Broom, the daughter of the glamorous Mrs. Arden, was the problem child of the school. Angular, plain, with straight hair and glasses, she hated everyone.

"Can you blame her?" Bill Abbott asked bitterly one day. He had been called in to stitch up a deep cut on the girl's arm, caused when she thrust her arm through the bathroom window in a rage because she didn't want Nancy to wash her hair.

They were in Mrs. Combie's sitting-room, drinking the tea she had made him and Bill looked round at them all—at Nancy's flushed angry face, for she had been very frightened; at the Matron's little frown of worry, Mrs. Combie's always placid smile and Candy's unhappy eyes. "Wouldn't you hate the world—" Bill asked passionately, "If you had a mother who can't be bothered with you? Who openly called you the Ugly Duckling? Who hasn't time to listen to your troubles but leaves you always with African servants? Wouldn't you hate the world when you saw your mother with different men and never knew from one day to the other what sort of stepfather you might get next?"

He stood up and said goodbye to them all rather curtly. After he had gone, Nancy said, her voice a mixture of irritation and anxiety:

"It's all very well for Bill to talk but I have to look after her. She won't do a thing she is told without a battle first. . . ."

Matron sighed. "I know, dear, that it is very difficult for you. I think I'll put her in charge of her dormitory. . . ."

Nancy stared in horror. "She'll be impossible."

Candy accepted another cup of tea from Mrs. Combie with a quick smile at her, brushed back her dark curly hair and said gravely: "I think Matron is right, Nancy. We had a girl like that at our school, hating everyone and twice she was expelled and only taken back because the headmistress was sorry for her. They made her a prefect one day and from then on, she completely changed."

"Because someone had confidence in her," Mrs. Combie said quietly. "No one loves or believes in Molly, poor child."

"We'll try it," Matron said firmly, and smiled at Nancy. "Give her a chance, Nancy, and don't expect miracles straight away. She has got to adjust herself to being on the other side of the fence . . ." she added with a chuckle.

Candy hurried down to her office. The mail was expected and she had to sort it out. As she passed the music-room, she saw that the door was ajar and the room empty. On a strange impulse, she slipped inside, closing the door and—opening the piano—she began to play softly. The room was dark with the massed clouds in the sky and she shivered a little as if a chill wind blew.

With a shock, she remembered the mail that had to be sorted and she jumped to her feet, closing the piano, turning . . .

And in the same moment, she saw that Dr. Faulkner was standing just inside the door, looking at her with a strange expression on his face and there was a blinding flash of lightning and a terrific clap of thunder.

Things happened so swiftly that Candy never knew how it was that she found herself in Dr. Faulkner's arms, clinging to him, burying her face in his chest. He held her close as the ground seemed to be rocked by another crashing thunder-clap . . . and then the silence surrounded them and she made an effort to get control of herself. He knew the moment she had done so and his arms fell away. She stared up at him, her small face drained white, her eyes enormous.

"I'm so sorry . . ." she said, her face hot with shame. Supposing he thought . . . ? "I didn't mean . . . I didn't know I . . . Oh, I am so sorry," she added, horribly confused because he still said nothing but just went on staring down at her.

Then he spoke. A little formally. "It is quite all right. I am well aware it was an automatic reaction." He smiled at her and she felt even more confused and added: "You are frightened of storms?"

She was still shaking and her knees felt absurdly weak and without thinking she put out her hand. He took it, then took her other hand as well and held them both in his warm clasp as he gazed down at her. His voice was very gentle as he said:

"Look, try to remember that if you can see the lightning and hear the thunder, you are safe. It would be over before you knew it had happened. . . ."

She tried to smile. "I know. It's just . . . just . . ."

"I know," he agreed reassuringly. "Now you must promise not to laugh if I tell you something?" He smiled at her. "I'm afraid of spiders." He chuckled.

She could not help smiling. "I'm glad I'm not the only one with fears," she said.

He gave her hands another reassuring squeeze and then let them

go. He leaned forward and whispered: "I'll tell you another secret. My sister is scared of worms! Ordinary harmless little worms." He chuckled, his face creasing with laughter. "When I was a child—a horrible little monster I must have been—my favourite trick was to drop worms down her back. Did I laugh when she screamed!" He smiled at her. "Very shocked?"

Candy was herself again. "I think most people are shocked as they look back on their childhood."

The tall, impressive-looking man with the smiling eyes was suddenly grave, as he said: "How right you are. You say the most amazingly shrewd things sometimes. . . ." He smiled down at her as he added: "Out of the mouths of babes . . . but I forgot . . ." His eyes were twinkling. "You are rather sensitive about your age. *I am twenty-one and Dr. Faulkner interviewed me . . .*" he said teasingly.

Candy's face burned painfully. "Someone told you?" she gasped.

He laughed outright. "Of course. We have our own grape vine whether we want it or not. I believe you were teased a lot when you came? I am sorry but I'm not sorry I took a chance and engaged you. I think we are very fortunate to have you . . ." He glanced at his watch and looked dismayed. "I must go. I have a meeting of the prefects. . . ." As he turned, he looked back at her. "You are all right, now?" he asked and, when she nodded, added quietly: "I wonder if you have any idea what a comfort you are to me?"

"Comfort?" Candy echoed, startled.

The handsome man smiled at her. "Yes. You are the only person here with whom I can relax," he said, and then he was gone and the door closed.

After a few moments and still feeling a little dazed, Candy went down to her office and saw the mailbag waiting for her. It was wet. She saw with surprise that the rain was beating madly against the window. It was as if the skies had opened and the rain came teeming down, falling fast and furiously so that the mud splashed up from the earth as the rain hit it.

There were some letters on her desk to be done for Miss Faulkner. When she had finished them, she looked round carefully. Miss Faulkner still loved to jump on her if she had her chance. Taking the staff letters with her, Candy found it dark in the hall, the rain making an unceasing hissing noise as it fell. Passing the open door of the Junior Playroom, she saw the children standing by the windows, gazing miserably at the rain and the ground fast becoming a quagmire.

"Isn't it a shame, Miss White?" Jenny Grace, an engagingly pretty child, said. "It was the day for the tennis tournaments and look at the weather!"

Candy had forgotten about it. She knew how much it meant to them all. She looked at the young dejected faces and saw that, at one end of the room, there was a piano. "Look," she said impulsively. "Why don't we have an informal dance? I'll play for you."

Molly Broom's eyes were, as always, hostile. "Can you play modern dance music, Miss White?" she asked.

"I'm not quite as old as that, Molly," Candy said laughingly. "I can play rock and roll, and bebop, and charleston, if that's what you like."

Molly's face changed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . ." she apologised awkwardly.

Candy laughed. "I'm sure you didn't. I must seem frightfully odd to you . . ."

Soon she had the children all dancing, many singing happily, their disappointment temporarily forgotten. Candy did not hear the door open but she wondered why suddenly everyone stopped singing . . . Turning her head as she sang alone, she was startled to see Miss Faulkner standing in the doorway, her face furious.

"A little less noise, please, Miss White," Miss Faulkner said in an icily cold voice and turned to leave the room.

There was an appalled silence. Candy pulled a rueful face and smiled at the children. "I suppose we were making rather a noise," she admitted.

"It was fun, though," Molly said, her face bright and eager.

The children came to stand round Candy, all saying the same and thanking her.

"Why don't you just play to us, Miss White," Jenny suggested. "She couldn't object to that—" she added rather scornfully.

"That's right," Ernest, a too-tall, too-thin boy said. "And play something *good*—not just jazz," he said.

"We want jazz . . ." the others shouted excitedly.

"I'll give you something of each," Candy promised and proceeded to play until the jangling clanging of the bell called them all to tea and they trooped noisily out of the room.

Upstairs Candy remembered Miss Faulkner's anger and then forgot it as Nancy came bursting in, her face flushed.

"What do you think, Candy—" she cried in a voice of despair. "We've got measles. Matron has sent for Bill to come back but I doubt if he'll get through in this rain. It's just teeming down." She went to the window and gazed out miserably. "Of all things—to have rain and measles together!" she said explosively.

Candy suddenly remembered that she had left the staff letters on the piano downstairs! It was considered an unforgivable crime! She hurried down and found to her relief the letters as she had left them. As she took them with her and crossed the hall again, she met Miss Faulkner and her brother.

"Miss White—" Miss Faulkner said in her iciest voice.

Candy's heart sank. She clutched the letters, fearing Miss Faulkner's comments. "Yes, Miss Faulkner," she said very politely.

"Who told you to entertain the children in such an unseemly manner, Miss White?" Miss Faulkner demanded.

Candy stared. *Unseemly? Children?* "I . . ." she began as she grasped that Miss Faulkner could only mean the dancing and singing.

Dr. Faulkner interrupted her, his voice smooth. "I asked Candace to play for the children," he said quietly. "I knew they were disappointed because the weather had stopped the tennis tournament."

Candy stared at him. He was protecting her—and he had called her Candace!

"I am very sorry if we were noisy, Miss Faulkner," Candy said placatingly. "I hadn't realised we . . ."

Miss Faulkner's face was distorted with anger. "Surely you are aware that I do not approve of such dances?" she asked frigidly. "Rock and roll . . ." She said the words as if they disgusted her. "Waltz and some square dancing, or Scottish reels is a very different matter . . ."

Candy flushed. "I am sorry, Miss Faulkner," she said again. "I didn't know you disapproved . . ."

Once again Dr. Faulkner intervened. "How could she know, Constance?" he asked impatiently. "We haven't had a dance since she has been here. In any case, I cannot think why you are so against rock and roll . . ."

"Andrew—" Miss Faulkner said sharply. "We have discussed this subject many times and . . ." Suddenly it was as if she remembered Candy was standing there for she turned to her and said: "That will be all, thank you, Miss White—" Her voice was curt. "Please do not let it occur again."

"No, Miss Faulkner," Candy said with outward meekness and escaped with relief, inwardly seething with wrath.

As soon as she got the opportunity, Candy thanked Dr. Faulkner for his protection.

"I'm afraid I never thought I was doing anything wrong," she told him, her eyes shining. "I wanted to cheer the children up . . ."

He smiled and rested his elbows on his desk. "Your motives were completely sincere and well-intentioned," he said in the slightly pedantic manner he sometimes used. "Unfortunately my sister is very intolerant and is convinced that rock and roll and vice go hand in hand." He smiled at the young girl sitting there with such an earnest look on her face. "We know differently, of course. Unfortunately last term we had a bitter and rather publicised quarrel on the subject. It was not a happy occasion and Constance was ill as a result. Nowadays I try to avoid such occasions."

"I am sorry," Candy said slowly, staring at him. "If I had known . . ."

"How could you know?" he asked and offered her a cigarette. He stood up and came to her to light it for her and his hand rested lightly on her shoulder. The touch of his fingers seemed to burn through the thin silk of her frock. "Constance . . ." he went on as he returned to his chair. "Is a strange mixture. Full of common sense, a good organiser, clever with money but she has some blind spots. We do not see eye to eye about the way to handle children. You remember that you said you thought most adults looked back on their childhood and were horrified as to the way they had behaved? Well, I always try to remember my youth when I handle young people. Constance, now, sets a standard of perfection that I am sure she never attained herself." He smiled at Candy. "She is fourteen years older than I am so I can't remember her childhood, of course, but I'm sure no human being could have been so perfect."

"You told me once that you had your own school," Candy ventured to say.

He stretched out his long legs and relaxed in the chair, looking thoughtful. "Yes, I and an old friend went into partnership and started a school in the Highlands of Rhodesia. We were both idealists. The pupils were to be friends of ours. They were to learn because we made it so interesting that they would be unable to resist learning." Andrew Faulkner smiled wryly. "Well, that part was fine and we got wonderful results. Unfortunately we had a lot of friends who could not pay their fees but had promising children and we rather foolishly thought they would be a good advertisement for the school so we taught them for reduced fees." He laughed. It was a short sharp bitter bark. "We were very naïve. Things got worse and worse and then my partner walked out on me. It was a battle straightening things out but in the end, I sold the school. I was very depressed. Then Constance appealed for my help. She said she had the chance to build up a fine school but she needed me. Well . . ." he said slowly, looking troubled as he stubbed out his cigarette. "I have never been very happy working with her but she had always done so much for me that I felt I owed it to her. My dream . . ." His face changed and he looked young and wistful for a moment . . . "is that one day when this place is fully established

I plan to sell my share in it and start on my own again." He had been studying his linked fingers. Now he looked up at Candy with a quick friendly smile. "Have you no idea when your mother is coming to see us? I do want her honest opinion of our endeavour."

"I'm afraid I don't know when she is coming?" Candy admitted. "She is so very much busier than she expected she would be . . ."

"You and your mother are very close?" Andrew asked thoughtfully. "You have no father?"

Candy looked troubled, now. "I'm afraid I know nothing about him," she confessed. "I don't know if he is dead or they are divorced. I only know it always upsets Mummy if I ask questions about him so . . . so nowadays I don't."

"I see . . ." Andrew said slowly. "You are the only child?"

Candy nodded. "Not that I've ever missed having brothers and sisters," she added hastily. "Mummy has always been wonderful to me. She has never denied me anything. I think I am very spoiled."

"I think so, too . . ." a grim voice said.

Candy turned instantly and Andrew looked up. Both stared in amazement at the angry woman who stood in the doorway.

Ten minutes later, Candy was back in her own office, cheeks red, heart pounding with anger. How dared Miss Faulkner be so insulting?

Her fingers began to fly over the typewriter keys and even though the rain was beating wildly against the window and the skies were still dark and threatening, Candy felt like singing. She had finished the letters when a fair head came round the door and Bill came strolling into the room.

"You look busy," he commented; looking ruefully out of the window he added. "What weather! I put chains on to get here and the roads are ghastly."

"How are the measles patients?" Candy asked cheerfully.

He shrugged. Leaning his long thin body against the wall, he lighted a cigarette and smiled at her. "As well as can be expected, I'm afraid." He gave a rueful grin. "You know, Candy, this school is understaffed at the best of times but when we get an epidemic like this, things really get out of hand. Nancy is showing signs of the strain and even Matron, bless her, admits that she is just a wee bit tired." He smiled bitterly. "I only wish I could make the Duchess realised how understaffed we are but all she can think of is the profit and loss account on the books."

Candy was startled by his unusual bitterness.

"Perhaps I could help . . ." she suggested.

He grinned. "Don't you work hard enough as it is?" Then he sobered. "Perhaps you could help out at nights? There's no real nursing to be done, just to have someone on duty."

"I'll ask Matron," Candy promised.

Bill smiled at her. His eyes were twinkling and then as she stared at him, she saw the laughter vanish as he said: "You like Anthony Tester?"

Startled, Candy nodded. "I took Nancy over there the other Sunday."

"I know. Anthony told me and you played for them again. Well . . ." he said and sighed heavily. "We've had to rush him to hospital with a haemorrhage. Frankly, I'm not too happy about him."

"I am sorry. Poor Dene . . ." Candy said at once.

"She is running the Mission for him for she knows that will help him most. He does worry so. I was only thinking, Candy, that when you are next in Nsingsi, that perhaps you could drop in at the

hospital and see him. He likes you . . . though I'm sure I don't know why," he teased, his eyes merry for a moment.

"I'm glad he likes me," Candy said soberly. "I admire him so much." She doodled with a pencil, not meeting Bill's eyes. "I also envy him. I mean, having a vocation like that. Knowing what you want to do and doing it." She looked up at him, startled by a sudden thought. "But then, Bill, you are like that, too. You have a vocation."

Bill looked embarrassed. "Oh, that's making it sound too noble. I just do a job of work," he said uncomfortably.

The door to Miss Faulkner's study opened. "Miss White . . ." Miss Faulkner began curtly but she paused as she saw Bill and her face changed as she smiled at him warmly. "Have you come to report on the progress of the patients?"

"Yes," Bill said briefly and, with a lazy smile at Candy, followed the tall austere figure into the other room.

Later Candy sought out the Matron. "I wondered if I could help at night?"

Matron sighed. "Well, you need your sleep, too, but . . . well, suppose you took over from eight o'clock in the evening for six hours . . . that would give us a chance to sleep and I'd let you sleep later in the morning for you could breakfast in bed." She sighed again. "Three of the staff are down with it now. Miss Stromberg considers it an insult that spots should appear on *her* body." Matron chuckled for a moment. "Bob, too, has been very sick but Nancy says he is better tonight. You wouldn't have to do any actual *nursing*, Candy, but it would be a great help. You're sure you don't mind."

Candy laughed. "Of course I don't mind . . ." she said.

But much later that night, she wondered if it was the truth. It was surprisingly hard to stay awake; she battled with sleep, her eyes closing, her head nodding whenever she sat down.

She sat in Matron's room, with a small lamp glowing but she felt on edge and absurdly nervous. It was eerie to be the only one awake in the quiet school. She stared out of the window at the dark night and saw that the dark clouds were rolling away and a small moon beginning to gleam. She jumped at the sound of a footstep and swung round. It was only Kwido, one of the houseboys, with a tray of coffee. He gave a big grin, said it was Matron's orders and then padded away, his white jacket and shorts making him almost look like a ghost as he flitted down the dark corridor. Candy was shocked to find her hands shaking as she poured out the coffee. After all, she had no responsibility. She could awaken Matron at any moment. She merely had to stay awake! The hot sweet coffee warmed her and revived her. She did a round of the wards and found Molly Broom sobbing, curled up into a round ball of tear-soaked misery. At first Molly resisted but then she gave way and clung to Candy, sobbing bitterly. It took Candy some time to quiet the child, and worried about the other patients. Candy wrapped Molly in a blanket and took her along to the Matron's room, there installing her in a chair, giving her some coffee.

After Molly was quiet and looked more herself, Candy said worriedly: "I must slip along and see if anyone wants anything, Molly. Stay here. You'll be all right."

"I'm fine. I'll wait for you," Molly promised, her eyes adoring Candy.

It took some time to make the rounds and she was dismayed by the time it had taken as she hurried back to the small room. She stood in the doorway and caught her breath with dismayed horror:

Molly had vanished . . .

In a blind panic of fear, she turned wildly, not knowing which way to look for Molly or where she could have gone . . . and she did not see the tall man walking down the corridors toward her until she bumped into him.

His hands steadied her. "Candace—what's the matter?"

It was Dr. Faulkner!

The shock was too much. To her horror, Candy burst into tears. "It's Molly," she gasped. "She's vanished."

The tall, broad-shouldered man held the weeping girl close to his heart for a moment, patting her on the back. "Molly is in bed," he said. "I found her half-asleep in the chair so carried her back to bed."

"Oh dear . . ." Candy hiccupped between sobs. "And I was so afraid for her . . ."

Andrew Faulkner led her back to the small sitting-room, made her drink what was left of the now lukewarm coffee.

"I'm sorry t-to be so silly," she said. "It is just that . . . that it was a bit eerie. I thought I was the only one awake and then . . . then Molly crying so bitterly and talking about her mother who hasn't written for a whole m-month . . . Molly thinks her mother may be ill and . . ."

"Her mother isn't ill," Andrew said in a stern voice. "She is just indifferent."

The tears welled up again in Candy's eyes and she dabbed ineffectually at them with her hand. Andrew gave her his handkerchief. At least she was calm again and could apologise once more.

"I think maybe I am a bit tired," she confessed.

He looked at her strangely, perching on the edge of the table and frowning. "I had no idea you were doing this. I worked late and met Kwido in the hall with the coffee. He told me who it was for . . . Whose idea was this?" he asked sternly.

Candy hesitated. She did not want to get anyone into trouble.

"Well . . . well, it seems they are very understaffed and so many children and staff have measles and . . . Nancy was very tired and so is Matron and . . . and both are on duty all day long and . . . Bill was a bit worried. I'm only doing this until two o'clock and . . ." Candy said uncomfortably, wondering why he was staring at her like that. "It was just that I thought Molly had . . ."

"Done something desperate?" Andrew asked gently. "I think she's far too sensible. She has brains. That's partly the trouble for she is intelligent enough to know that her mother can't be bothered with her."

"How can a mother be like that?" Candy asked impulsively, and then regretted her nasty words for hadn't someone said there was a chance that Andrew might marry Mrs. Arden?

Andrew did not seem annoyed, instead he agreed. "Some parents act strangely. I see it so often. They want to have children of whom they can boast—but they don't want to have to help them in any way. Not even by the simple method of loving them. Love is all important," he said.

The world suddenly seemed very far away.

"I think love is all important, don't you, Candace?" Andrew asked very softly.

She stared at him and caught her breath. "Yes . . . yes, I do . . ." she said quietly.

He leaned forward suddenly and cupped her chin in his warm hand and then—very gently—kissed her.

It was over in a moment and then he stood up.

"You're a sweet child, Candace," he said almost sadly and left her.

In the morning, Dr. Faulkner stood by Candy's desk, his manner formal and his voice composed. Just as if nothing had happened. But something had—for everything now was different.

"I have to take Miss Stromberg into the hospital at Nsingsi," he said stiffly, "And I want you to accompany us."

What a nightmare journey it was despite the chains on the car as the rain beat against the windscreen and the wipers seemed helpless.

It was a relief when they reached the hospital and helped Miss Stromberg inside. Candy turned her head and saw Andrew driving off, with not even a backward glance for her. A little dismally she followed Miss Rowland, who had come with them, down the corridor. Soon Miss Stromberg was in bed, clutching a hot water bottle to her heart and meekly letting the nurses take her temperature.

They left her in the small private ward and Miss Rowland said she had to see the Matron, if Candy did not mind waiting.

"I wonder if I might see Anthony Tester," Candy said, feeling guilty because she had forgotten the sick man.

Matron, a tall woman with a tightly closed mouth, said that she could but she must not excite him.

Candy's high heels click-clacked down the polished corridor as she went to find Ward Three. She tapped on the half-open door and went in. She stood, transfixed with horror at the sight of the gaunt yellowish face with the skin drawn tautly over the high cheekbones. But Anthony's eyes were bright with surprised happiness when he saw her.

"How nice . . . what a delightful surprise . . ." he whispered huskily. "On such a dreadful day."

She tried to hide her dismay as she took his thin cold hand and sat by his side. "Bill told me you were here . . . We've brought in one of the staff . . ." What did you talk about to a sick man? She took off the little macintosh hat and shook her damp curls. "Matron said I mustn't excite you."

Anthony looked amused. "Matron doesn't know what she's talking about. I feel much better for just seeing you."

She tried to make him laugh, telling him about Miss Stromberg's aversion to Matron, about little things at the school. She was distressed when his laugh ended in a painful hacking cough. "I'm tiring you . . ." she said unhappily.

He shook his head and clung to her hand. His eyes, deep-set in his face, frightened her a little by the intensity of their stare. "Just to see you . . . you're so different from . . . all the girls I've known . . ." he said quietly. He smiled at her. "I wish I was ten years younger and . . . and healthy."

She felt her cheeks glowing. "Why, Anthony, what a sweet thing to say." Her eyes smarted. "But you are not so ill. You'll get better . . ."

He smiled at her and thin fingers tightened. "Oh, yes, I'll get better and then I'll have another attack and so it will go on. Don't look like that, little Candy. I'm not afraid. You see I know that there is no death and where I am going I shall be well and happy. It is those who are left." He half-closed his eyes for a moment. "Dene. We are orphans. Alone in the world . . ." He sighed. "One gives one's life to God but shouldn't one think of one's sister . . ." he said slowly. Then he smiled. "I always forget . . . there's Bill. Of course Dene will be all . . ."

The Matron walked in at that moment and insisted that Candy

should leave. Hurrying down the corridor in the wake of Matron's angrily waving starched dress, they paused as a tall thin man in a white coat came hurtling down the corridor, his stethoscope flapping.

He skidded to a halt. "Candy . . ." He sounded pleased. "Good girl. Seen Anthony?"

Bill took Candy's hands and swung them, smiling down at her. "You're a good girl," he said again. "It means so much to Anthony."

Candy was startled by his warmth. Then she understood that any favour done to Anthony was a personal favour to Bill because he was Anthony's brother-in-law-to-be.

"He's a dear . . . I'm flattered that he likes me . . ." Candy said.

"You may well be," Bill said dryly. "Anthony is hard to please."

Candy felt confused because Bill was staring at her strangely.

She laughed uneasily. "I can't think why he should like me . . . I'm . . ."

"Can't you?" Bill asked. And then he said a very odd thing. "I can . . ."

She felt so confused and bewildered by his strange expression that it was a relief to see Miss Rowland looking for her. . . .

"Dr. Faulkner's here . . ." Miss Rowland called.

Candy immediately forgot Bill, hardly noticing that he followed them out into the rain-drenched world. Candy was told to sit in the front this time as the car drew away, she waved vaguely to Bill and then sat, staring ahead, very conscious that Andrew was by her side.

"We'll have coffee and sandwiches at the hotel," Andrew said in his sternest voice, not looking at her. "Then I am picking up two women who have been nurses in the past and who are coming to help us out over this emergency."

Candy looked at his impassive face for a second. "Matron will be relieved."

She saw the smile make his mouth relax. "And you will no longer be called upon to sit up at night . . ." he said.

It was a relief when they reached the school and the two middle-aged plump women who were to help them out had to be taken to Matron and introduced, and their late lunch was a gay meal, no one noticing Candy's unusual silence. Immediately afterwards, she hurried to her office and was grateful for the pile of work waiting for her.

Typing rapidly, she still could not get her thoughts under control. Why had Andrew kissed her? Was she making too much of an insignificant incident? Her cheeks burned suddenly with shame as she remembered that the previous secretary had fallen in love with Andrew and had been asked to leave as a result. . . . Was she behaving in the same way?

"What exactly do you think you are doing, Miss White?" an icily angry voice asked.

With a start, Candy returned to her surroundings, finding Miss Faulkner by her side, gazing furiously at what Candy had typed. Still a little dazed, Candy stared at the paper in the typewriter and blinked as she read:

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD WOMEN TO COME TO THE AID OF CANDY.

After days of torrential rain, the sun suddenly appeared, flooding the world with warmth and golden light. As the sun blazed down out of a cloudless blue sky, Candy began to chatter and laugh again, telling herself she was over that odd illogical infatuation that had troubled her for a while. Half-term came and an influx of parents,

arriving in big cars to take their children out for the day. Candy drove some of the other children to Nsingisi to catch a bus that would take them to the railhead, for those who lived within reasonable distance were allowed to go home for the long weekend.

Half-term over, school settled down into routine again but the sun shone continuously. One morning Candy slipped into Assembly for prayers and heard Dr. Faulkner announce that—depending on half-terms tests' results—certain of the children would be allowed to go to the Game Reserve if they wished to do so. . . .

As the hum of excited conversation swept through the hall, Candy caught her breath. Would Dr. Faulkner remember his half-promise to her?

Later that morning, Dr. Faulkner gave her a list of names to type. The door to Miss Faulkner's room was half-open and from where Candy sat, she could see Miss Faulkner bent over some papers on her desk.

"By the way, Miss White," Dr. Faulkner said in his somewhat precise way, "I know you have not been in Africa very long and I wondered if you would care to join the Game Reserve outing? Miss Boone is also coming and I am taking Mr. Robinson to help me keep order for the children are apt to get over-excited . . ."

Candy clasped her hands but she stilled the eager words on her tongue, very conscious that Miss Faulkner could hear every word. "It is very good of you to give me the opportunity, sir," she said demurely. "I would like to accept it, very much indeed."

"Good. I'll let you have all the details later . . ." Dr. Faulkner said curtly but as he turned away he gave her a special smile.

There was so much to discuss, to plan, to dream about but at last the great day arrived. They went in the school bus, Andrew driving with Candy sitting by his side. The children piled into the bus, talking excitedly and did not stop even when Miss Faulkner came out on to the steps to frown disapprovingly.

It was a long journey over the rough corrugated earth roads and Candy was constantly thrown against Andrew's broad shoulder. Then he would smile at her and she would smile back at him. . . . How different he was, away from his sister, as he teased the children and chatted to Candy.

She was almost sorry when the journey came to an end and they reached the Game Reserve and made for the Rest Camp where they all unloaded. Candy gazed round curiously at the cone-shaped, thatched-roof huts which were grouped round a large central building. The children trooped into their respective rondawels to change into jeans and shorts and Candy and Nancy, sharing a small hut, changed into light leisure clothes.

There was just time for a brief run before the gates would be closed for the night and Dr. Faulkner gave them all a small pep talk as he gazed at their eager excited faces and at the cameras slung from the children's shoulders.

"I want you to remember that we are all here to enjoy ourselves so we mustn't be selfish and spoil someone else's pleasure . . ." he said in his deep attractive voice. "Obey orders instantly, and on no account, is anyone to get out of the bus. Understand?" he asked, with a sudden smile.

"Oh yes, sir . . ." chorused many impatient voices.

As the bus drove slowly over the gravel roads, Candy looked round her interestedly at the small green bushes, the funny spreading little trees. Again she was by Andrew's side and he slowed up and pointed his hand and she gasped as her eyes suddenly found the almost hidden herd of graceful impala. As Andrew drove on slowly

they caught glimpses of zebra—then the tall head of a giraffe gazed at them curiously from over a tall bush. The giraffe strolled out to have a good look at them as the bus paused, and then—just like a fashion model—he slowly turned in a circle to give them a good view before he walked off with his odd jerky gait.

The time rushed by but they had a glimpse of buffalo and then saw the grey bulk of an elephant in the distance but it was time to go back to the camp.

That evening Candy found it very pleasant as they sat round the camp fire, eating grilled steak, drinking cup after cup of sweet hot coffee. The air was filled with the tang of smoke and the smell of cooking food and the chatter and laughter of many relaxed people, determined to enjoy themselves. There followed two blissful days of driving through the Reserve, catching glimpses of elephants, great grey monsters who flapped their ears and stamped across the road, lifting their feet oddly, the steam pouring off their huge bodies; of watching hippo in the pool, lazily yawning, looking like prehistoric monsters; of many giraffe—of quite a few lions, mostly dozing in the sunshine, and of course, wildebeeste, kudu, and buck galore.

It was their last night and Candy sat by the fire feeling miserable.

"Come for a stroll?" Andrew Faulkner asked quietly.

Her heart leaping excitedly, Candy gave him her hand and he pulled her to her feet. It was pleasant walking in the warm dark night, looking at the glow from the camp fires, hearing soft music drifting from the rondawels, the occasional cough-like roar of a lion, the sudden chattering of monkeys.

They had walked out of the lights and were standing in the shadow of a rondawel, looking back at the groups of people round the fires, the strange silhouettes they made.

"We don't need words, do we, Comfort darling?" Andrew said quietly, his hands on her arms as he turned her to look at him.

She gazed at the dim blur that was his face. "I . . ." she began. And knew that it was a moment of truth. "No, Andrew, we don't," she said.

He caught her close and one hand tipped back her head as he bent to kiss her. It began as a gentle kiss but Candy's arms were suddenly round his neck and she was returning the kiss with a strange unusual passion. She had never felt like this before. . . .

When he let her go, they stood, holding hands, saying nothing for a long moment and then Candy whispered: "What will your sister say?"

Andrew lifted her hand and held it against his mouth. "She will accept it," he said softly.

And then he kissed her again. And again—and again. Long thrilling kisses that made the world rock round Candy while the stars seemed to be doing a fantastic dance.

At last he released her and said it was time for them to return—it would not do for Bob and Nancy to guess. "We must plan, my darling," he added softly.

"Plan?" she asked, startled. What was there to plan? They loved one another—what else was there to it. He swung her hand slowly and as they came into the lighted part of the camp, she saw that he was very troubled.

"What is it, Andrew?" she asked him.

There was an air of unreality about the whole scene.

"I'm just wondering how to hide it."

She stared at him, feeling suddenly cold. "Hide what?"

"Why, my love for you, of course," he said slowly.

Her heart seemed to jerk. "Have we got to hide it?" she asked him.

"Of course . . ." He sounded surprised at such a question. "How could we announce it in the middle of term? Everything would be disrupted. It is going to be a shock for Constance, in any case, but I would not dare risk telling her just now when we are so busy." He looked down at her, his face puzzled. "Surely you understand, Comfort?" He waited while she struggled to speak for the disappointment flooding her was absurdly heavy. "We can be patient when we have so much to look forward to, can't we, darling?" he asked and there was a wistful note in his voice that eased her pain.

"Of course we can . . ." she said quickly and tried to smile at him.

"Oh, Comfort . . ." Andrew said and now his voice was despairing. "Don't think it is because I don't love you—or because I don't want the world to know about us. It's Constance. I owe her so much—I have to think of her health . . ." He sighed. "If we could keep it a secret until the holidays, everything would be simplified . . ."

"Of course I understand, Andrew, and I love you the more for thinking of Constance. It's just . . . just . . ." Her voice wobbled a little. "Just that I am wondering if I can hide it."

It was almost as if Miss Faulkner sensed something, for after their return from the Game Reserve, she grew more and more difficult. The sun shone from a cloudless sky but something had happened to the school. Or was she the one who had changed, Candy wondered. The children were in a strange mood, sullen, grumbling, fighting. Even the staff seemed to be affected and the staff-room was full of complaints.

"Miss Faulkner isn't making it any easier for us," Malcolm Fenn said with a rueful smile. "Have you heard the latest? The annual party to which we invite the other schools in the neighbourhood has been cancelled because Miss Faulkner says the children have been slacking and the tests' results were poor." He sighed. "Much as I admire her many good traits, I do feel that she is a bit difficult."

Candy was startled for normally Malcolm said little, hiding always behind a newspaper.

Gabrielle Leroux tossed her head in agreement. "She is a fanatic—that one," she said scornfully. "She should be teaching saints, not children. She is of a stupidity . . ." she paused. "She is angry because the older boys pay me the compliments. Is it not natural that they should do so? Are they not little men . . .? They must learn the politenesses some time. . . ."

Horace Hyde, who was, according to Nancy, secretly in love with Miss Faulkner said mildly: "I think she is right in one respect, Gabrielle. You are inclined to go to a young man's head."

The French woman fluttered long dark lashes at him. "'Orace—that from you is a vairy great compleement. I thank you . . ." she smiled at him.

"Why doesn't Faulkner put his foot down," Patrick O'Shea said crossly. "Sure and I know he's scared to death of the old harridan but . . ."

"Patrick—" Horace said in a shocked voice, leaning forward to shake out his pipe.

"Sure and I'm sorry, Horace, but I'm livid, man, just livid," Patrick said, lighting a cigarette with trembling hands. "The latest is that I must segregate the riding classes. Sure and I'm asking you—what harm could the poor darlings be up to while they're on the back of a horse?" he demanded.

Candy felt acutely uncomfortable as she battled with desire to leap to Andrew's defence, to point out to the others what they should have seen—that Constance's health was a constant source of anxiety to Andrew, but she dared not speak, lest she betray their secret.

She slipped away quietly to the sanctuary of her bedroom and unpinned the engagement ring Andrew had given her. She always kept it pinned to her petticoat so that it touched her warm skin, reminding her that by its very touch that Andrew loved her. She put the ring on her finger, holding out her hand so that the light caused the lovely solitaire diamond to sparkle. How she longed for the day when she could openly wear it—when she could face the others and have the right to defend Andrew. If only the end of the term would come . . .

She re-read her mother's letter, suddenly longing for her. Her mother said again and again how sorry she was that she had not been able to get up to see Candy. "The work piles up, darling, now they want me to fit in an extra class. They are so eager to learn I just can't refuse . . ." she had written. "I only hope you are as happy as you say. Sometimes I wonder . . ."

Candy found her writing-case and wrote to her mother.

"Please don't worry about me, Mummy darling, although Miss Faulkner is an old devil and finds fault the whole time, her brother is wonderful, Honestly I am very happy indeed. I have something very exciting to tell you but I'll tell you it in the holidays for it's a secret now. I can't wait to tell you—it's so wonderful . . ."

She hurried down into the hall to drop the letter in the post bag. Passing an open classroom door she saw a group of children standing round a figure on the floor. It was Miss Rowland! Crumpled on the ground and unconscious.

Tom Snipe, one of the prefects had sent for Miss Matron, he told Candy. "She just blacked out—" he said worriedly. "I didn't like to move her."

"You did quite right," Candy said with a warm reassuring smile as she bent to straighten the crumpled skirt.

Looking up, Candy saw the children's scared faces. She smiled at them. "Don't you think you should go back to your work?" she said gently. "That is what Miss Rowland would wish, I'm sure. I'll stay with her."

The children seemed to melt away into their desks but the room was very quiet as they bent over their books, now and then glancing back at Candy as she knelt by Miss Rowland, trying not to look worried. Suddenly Matron was there, murmuring something as she knelt by the prostrate body. She touched her starched bodice significantly and said quietly: "She's had these turns before. I've sent for Bill but we can move her to her room . . ."

Candy could feel the hushed tension throughout the school and she was surprised at the number of children who stopped to enquire about Miss Rowland.

"Everyone loves her," Candy said as she sat with Matron, waiting for Bill's report.

Matron sniffed. "And so I should think. She's the one who keeps Miss Faulkner from acting like a fanatic. I know I shouldn't say such things but Miss Rowland softens Miss Faulkner's orders, tries to alter them, often persuades Miss Faulkner to change her mind. She's the only one in the school who has any influence over her—

or sufficient courage to face up to her," Matron said and turned away to give her nose a good blow.

Bill came into the room with a weary step. He smiled vaguely at Candy but she realised that he hardly saw her as he flopped into a chair, stretching out his long legs. "I don't like it, Matron dear," he said as he pulled out his cigarette case, for once forgetting to offer it round. "She's all right for it was only slight but . . ." He lit his cigarette and tossed the match out of the open window, giving a swift apologetic grimace at Matron. "Sorry—forgot . . . Where was I? Oh yes, I say she must go to Durban and see a specialist. She says she can't be spared at this important part of the term." He sat up and stubbed out the hardly smoked cigarette in the ash-tray. "I say that's madness. If something isn't done soon, they won't have a Miss Rowland at all. I think I'll go and put the fear of death in the Duchess. I know Miss Rowland is essential here . . . but what she needs is a thorough overhaul and a good rest." He stood up, looking thinner even than usual, his face tired as he rubbed his hand over it. "Wish me luck—" he said and was gone.

Matron stood up and emptied the ash-tray, straightened the tablecloth. "Now there is another who is not scared of her highness," she said. "Bill puts health first—but I doubt if she will. Still, if anyone can persuade her, Bill can, that I'm sure. She has a soft spot for him, and do you know why?" she asked Candy as she went to put the curtain straight for the breeze was blowing it. "Because he stands up to her and she respects him for it!"

Candy nodded and made an excuse to escape from the room. It was getting very hard to remain silent while they insinuated that Andrew was afraid of his sister.

And it was, eventually, Andrew who persuaded his sister to let Miss Rowland go to Durban two days later, after they had seen Miss Rowland, accompanied by Constance Faulkner, set off in the car, driven by the African chauffeur, that Andrew followed Candy into her office.

"I have some letters I want to dictate, Miss White," he said formally and dutifully she followed him with her notebook and pencils.

Once they were alone, he kissed her and the world seemed to rock and only steadied as he let her go and smiled down at her. "I'm afraid we must be careful for some people have a nasty habit of forgetting to knock at times. Sit down, Comfort. . . ."

How she loved that word on his lips! Feeling ridiculously shaky at the knees, Candy obeyed and smiled at him, then she unpinned her ring, slipping it on to her finger, holding out her hand to admire it.

"I do so love my ring, Andrew," she said quickly. "It keeps me close to you when things are bad."

He leaned forward, his handsome face concerned. "And are they bad, darling? It won't be for long . . ." He smiled suddenly: "Wasn't I clever?" he asked. "I killed two birds with one stone, to use a hoary phrase. I persuaded Constance that Miss Rowland *must* go to a specialist—and I also said one of us should go with her." He chuckled. "Constance thought it was more proper that she should go—which was just what I wanted. So now we can snatch some moments alone together."

She smiled back rather uncertainly.

Andrew got up to give her a cigarette. "You had better make some notes so that if anyone comes in, it will look as if I have just been interrupted . . ."

Obediently she took down half a letter and then he relaxed in his chair, stretching out his legs, smiling at her as she relaxed in turn.

"Darling," he began, "Let's talk of our future. Are you sure you can bear to be a headmaster's wife? Have all those noisy brats round you all the time? Don't they drive you nearly mad with their noise and their stupidity?"

Candy laughed gaily. "Of course not. I'm just afraid I won't make a very good headmaster's wife, Andrew."

He looked at her and his eyes twinkled. "Maybe you've got a few things to learn, Comfort, but you will—in time. Just to walk instead of run, not to look quite so enchantingly young and gay, to talk in a more dignified manner. I think you will be a perfect one. . . ." His eyes half-closed and his face was sober: "If only I could build up this school a bit more. If only I could get hold of another director. . . ."

Curled up in the chair, legs tucked under her, Candy glanced round the room, realising for the first time that one day she would call this her husband's study.

"Are directors so important?" she asked idly, thinking that she would have brighter curtains for the room, a new carpet as well.

"Of course directors are important," Andrew said, sounding so shocked that she immediately gave him all her attention. "Most important and for several reasons. First . . ." He marked the reasons off on his fingers in turn. "First, they invest money in the school—this means enlargements of buildings, added amenities. Parents appreciate this and this, in turn, means more children come to the school and we get more fees and greater prestige. Secondly, their names are important and often their names are enough. For instance, if a world-famous man is a director of a school, it shows that he approves of a school and that is a great help . . ."

"I see . . ." Candy said very slowly. Somewhere at the back of her mind there was a tiny seed of an idea. "You have several directors?"

Again Andrew marked them on his fingers. "Kim Powell, famous name, famous lawyer—Sam Covington, a millionaire. Mrs. Gilda Grace, not only wealthy but with many friends. Her grandchild is here and she is always sending us pupils . . ."

"You haven't a doctor?" Candy asked and it was as if the seed was sprouting as she held her breath, waiting for his answer.

Andrew shook his head. "Not yet," he said rather sadly. He leaned forward and as he talked, his face came alive, his voice eager. "If I could build up the school, I could sell my share in it. I can't leave Constance until I know that I have built secure foundations for her future. But once I have left Constance, we can start our own school . . ." He gazed at Candy who stared back, eyes wide with excitement as the seed of a thought rapidly grew. "Think of it, Comfort—" Andrew said in his deep thrilling voice. "You and I—all alone."

"Andrew—" The words bubbled out of her mouth like lava from an erupting volcano. "Couldn't we ask my mother to be a director?" She held her breath as she watched his face.

"You mean . . ." Excitement lit up his face for a moment and then it died. "I wonder if she would, Comfort," he said slowly. "It's quite a responsibility. She might not approve of the school. . . ."

"I'm sure she would . . ." Candy said eagerly, leaning forward to lay her small warm hand on his. "Don't you want her, Andrew?" she asked, suddenly wondering if that was the reason for his hesitation.

His hand gripped hers. "Want her . . . Why, it would be the answer to everything. Your mother is so well-known, her approval

would be a great help. But . . . but I wouldn't like to ask her to be . . ."

"But I could ask her . . ." Candy interrupted excitedly. "I'm sure Mummy would be willing. . . ."

Footsteps sounded outside in the corridor and Candy snatched up her notebook, bending her head, hating the secrecy they had to observe.

Andrew began to dictate in a wooden voice but she could see how he had clenched his hands as if tense. The steps passed the door and both could relax and smile at one another in relief.

"Comfort . . ." Andrew said softly, and the way he said it made it sound like a caress. "How lucky I am to be loved by you."

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE afternoon Candy was getting some work up to date. Andrew was in Nsingsi and Miss Faulkner still away in Durban with Miss Rowland. As Candy sat in front of her typewriter, she slipped on her engagement ring and held out her hand, turning it this way and that, to let the light make the diamond sparkle.

"Whose ring is that . . . ?" Bill demanded.

Cady jumped. She had not heard the door open. She stared at the tall thin doctor whose fair hair was ruffled and whose face wore a strange look. He closed the door behind him and leant against it.

"I didn't know you were engaged . . ." he said.

Candy's cheeks were bright red with guilt as she pulled off the ring. "It's a secret, Bill. Promise you won't tell anyone," she begged, her voice frightened.

"I won't tell anyone if you tell me why it is a secret—" he told her sternly.

She stood up her face appealing. "Please, Bill—" she told him desperately, "It's a secret."

He did not relax. "Why is it a secret?" he asked sternly. "Are you sure he isn't married . . . ?"

"Of course Andrew . . ." she began indignantly and then stopped. —her hand flew to her mouth like that of a guilty child, her grey eyes large and frightened.

"Andrew . . ." Bill repeated slowly. He frowned. "Andrew Faulkner?"

Candy lifted her chin defiantly. "And why not?"

There was a strange look on Bill's face. "What does Constance say?"

Candy's eyes wavered under his direct stare. "She doesn't know yet. That's why it is a secret. Just until the holidays." She moved to Bill's side, laid her hand on his arm appealingly. "Please . . . please . . . Bill, you won't tell anyone?" she pleaded.

He smiled down at her. "Don't get so het-up, Candy. Your secret is safe with me. I'm just puzzled about the secrecy, that's all. You are happy, Candy?"

She clasped her hands. "Oh, Bill, you have no idea. It is wonderful—" she told him earnestly.

He opened the door and smiled back at her. "I'm glad, Candy. Don't worry, your secret is safe with me."

After he had gone, she sat and stared at her typewriter blindly, feeling relief sweep over her. You could trust Bill. How awful had it been someone else. How furious Andrew would have been—how difficult it would have been to explain her childish behaviour.

She had finished her work and was tidying the office when Bill poked his head round the door. "Can you be free tomorrow?" he asked cheerfully. "Anthony is home and I'm going to the Mission . . ."

"Is he home again?" Candy asked quickly. "I meant to ask you but . . ."

"You had other things on your mind, eh?" Bill asked with a friendly smile. "Yes, he is better though far from well. I'll pick you up at two o'clock. O.K.?"

"O.K.—" she said happily.

It was never difficult to go out for an afternoon with Miss Faulkner away so Candy was waiting when Bill called for her the following day.

"Good girl—punctual . . ." he said, leaning over and opening the car door for her.

"Mummy says that punctuality is an important virtue—" Candy said with a prim little smile and dancing eyes.

Bill, letting in the clutch, chuckled. "This fabulous mother of yours that you are always quoting. When are we going to see her?"

Candy curled up on the seat by his side, relaxed as she always was with Bill. "It isn't her fault. Her programme of lecturing seems to expand all the time. . . ."

As they drove along the steep mountain road with huge boulders on either side, stones from the gravel road were flung up by the tyres, making noisy *pings* as they hit the car. "I'd like to meet her very much," Bill said, his eyes intent on the blind corners ahead round which cars had an uncomfortable habit of hurtling. "I've read several of her books. Basically I agree with her but there are one or two points . . ."

Candy laughed happily. "Mummy will love to argue with you. She simply loathes people who fawn and keep saying: 'Oh I quite agree with you—' when all the time, you know they don't . . ." she said.

"Infuriating. I know the feeling," Bill agreed cheerfully as he slowed up abruptly to allow a herd of goats to stroll across the road. "By the way, does she know about Andrew?"

Candy looked at his face quickly but he was staring ahead. "Not yet," she admitted. "I'm telling her when I see her. It isn't very easy to write about it. . . ."

"Isn't it?" Bill asked.

Again Candy glanced at him sharply—was there a strange note in his voice.

The car was gathering speed as they climbed. There were even larger boulders lying on the veld either side of the road, while stunted green bushes grew from between the crevices.

"I have several spastic children amongst my African patients," Bill broke the silence to say. "If your mother could spare the time when she comes, I'd be most grateful for her advice."

Candy turned to him eagerly, grateful for the chance to get back on their old friendly footing. "I'm sure she'd like to see them. She can always find time for everything," she said quickly. "I'll ask her."

They found Anthony sitting in a chair in the sunshine, a dozen African children around him, as he told them a story. His face brightened when he saw his visitors but Candy felt sick with misery as she saw the effort he had to make to stand up.

"This is good of you," he said, beaming down at her as he held her hand. One of the *umfaans* came running with a chair for her. "Do sit down. The sunshine today is so warming."

Despite the glaring sunshine, it was pleasant sitting there with the

valley before them and as Anthony talked of the weather and of his children, Candy fought to hide the horror she felt as she looked at the valiant skeleton of a man.

She was startled when he said gravely: "Candy, when you visited me in hospital, I was under drugs and said . . . said many things I shouldn't have said. Did I offend you in any way?"

Candy stared in amazement. "Offend me?" She felt her cheeks grow hot. "Oh no, Anthony, you paid me the greatest compliment a man can pay any woman."

It was his cheeks that were red, now. "I was afraid . . . you see . . . you see Sister said I talked about you all the time?"

"Is that a crime?" Candy asked gaily, her eyes stinging.

He smiled at her with such sweetness that her throat felt taut. "I hope not—for I'm sure it would only be nice things that I could say about you," he told her gently.

Dene came toward them, her hand tucked casually through Bill's arm. "Hello Candy," she said in a friendly voice but her eyes were hostile.

Candy smiled back and wished she could tell Dene that there was no need to be jealous of her for she was in love with Andrew, not Bill. Dene looked tired and thin and rather unhappy; now she frowned as she glanced at her brother. "Time for your rest, Anthony," she said, her voice sharp.

Anthony's face was dismayed. "But . . ." he began but Bill spoke at the same time.

"We'll come again, old chap, but I'm afraid I must be off, now."

As they drove away from the Mission, Candy looked at him. "Were you really in such a hurry or were you concerned for Anthony?" she asked.

"I was in a hurry," he told her sternly, "And it does not really matter how tired Anthony gets any more. My one wish is for him to be happy. He loves you, you know," Bill added almost casually.

Candy's cheeks were hot. "I know," she said humbly, "I only wish there was something I could do about it."

"There isn't much," Bill told her. "Except see him now and then—and maybe you could think up an excuse to write to him. Send him some magazines or something."

"I'll do that, Bill . . ." Candy promised. It was little enough.

She noticed suddenly that they were on a new road—a narrow winding road that looked as if it was seldom used. Even more startled, she stared curiously at him as he drove off the road, bumping over the rough grass, and stopped the car under a huge overhanging rock, out of which grew a tree at a strange angle but that shaded the car from the sunshine.

Bill turned to face her after he had switched off the engine. She felt cold—why was he looking so grim? "I must talk to you," he said sternly.

She twisted on the seat, tucking her legs under her, a little scared by his voice. "What's wrong, Bill?"

He offered her a cigarette and as he lit them both she saw with surprise that his hand was shaking. "Nothing is wrong—" he said slowly, "And yet everything is wrong. Maybe I have no right to talk to you about it, Candy—maybe I should mind my own business but you . . . you are young and alone here and . . . and susceptible." He paused and she saw that he was gazing at her anxiously. "I know I'm walking in where angels would fear to tread but I must . . ." He rubbed his hand over his face and she saw for a moment how tired and worried he was. "If I didn't . . . didn't like you . . ."

Candy tried to lighten the heavy atmosphere. "That's the usual preliminary to a lecture," she said gaily. "What have I done wrong now?"

"It is not what you have done . . ." Bill said slowly as he stared ahead of him. His next question came as a surprise. "Do you know anything about Andrew's childhood?"

Candy tensed and her eyes were wary. "I know that he was left an orphan when he was four years old," she began. "And that Constance who was fourteen years older than he was, has brought him up . . ."

"That is the bare bones of the story," Bill said. He began to rub his hand round and round the steering wheel as he talked. "He was a very delicate child and sleeping with his parents when a drunk native murdered them both. Constance was in the next room and heard the screams and ran for help. . . . When she and a neighbour got back, Andrew was . . . well, delirious, hysterical. He clung to Constance and for nearly six years, would not let her out of his sight." Bill recounted the dreadful story woodenly but the horror of it gripped Candy who was staring at him silently. "He overcame his fear of being alone in time but he still occasionally gets nightmares. He will dream that he is covered with blood—the blood of his mother. They found him under her bed, you see. Terrified he had crawled there and his mother's blood . . ." Bill paused. "I'm sorry, Candy, but he is entirely dependent on his sister. It is not his fault but . . ."

She found her voice. "He had his own school. . . ."

Bill looked at her and she saw compassion in his eyes. "Don't think I'm blaming the poor chap. I'm not. He tries to break away but each time he has to go back to her. She is his father, mother, guide, support, everything. He started this school against Constance's wishes for she disapproved of his friend, Andrew did it as a gesture of defiance, a sign of independence. Unfortunately the school failed. Constance had to rescue him. It made Andrew a hundred times more dependent on her."

As some of the sick horror receded from Candy's mind, she began to think lucidly. This was a very different story from Andrew's . . .

She saw that Bill's knuckles were white as he gripped the steering wheel and stared ahead. "I'm telling you this, Candy—" he said harshly, "Because as Andrew's medical adviser, I don't think he is a suitable husband for you. If . . . if I wasn't so anxious about you, I wouldn't have told you for Andrew has a right to keep the secret of his dependence on his sister to himself. He wants to break away from her but he needs someone to replace her in his life—someone to support him, to comfort him . . ." Bill turned sharply for instinctively Candy had moved as Bill used the word *comfort*. "Andrew is completely dependent on Constance," Bill continued slowly. "I have been battling for ages to get him to see a psychiatrist. If you do marry him, I suggest you persuade him to . . ."

"Of course I shall marry him," Candy said stiffly, fighting the sick anger she felt, the fear that would not be denied.

Bill gave her a strange fleeting smile. "Well, first, you must face some facts. First, he will never throw off Constance. She needs him as much as he needs her so she won't let him go—ever. Secondly, he dislikes children but relishes the power he feels over them. His sister bosses him so he bosses the children in turn. Thirdly, he is a liar. He told you Constance was delicate. She is as strong as a horse. He has less influence over her than I have. I kept asking Constance to send Philippa Rowland to a specialist but she would

not hear of it—it was only when I proved that it might be cheaper this way in the long run.” Watching Candy’s face, Bill said bitterly. “I bet Andrew told you that he had persuaded Constance.” He chuckled suddenly. “Don’t look like that, Candy—as if the end of the world has come,” he said, more lightly. “You don’t have to believe me if you don’t want to—Andrew is neither mad nor wicked—he is just an unfortunate devil who was born weak and could never throw off the horror of that childhood scene. Constance has encouraged him to depend on her and he does try to fight her domination—in fact, he puts up a pretty convincing façade at times.” Bill started the engine and began to reverse off the grass. “You can take your choice, Candy,” he said more cheerfully. “Either Andrew is a liar—or I am.”

“Please take me back to the school—” Candy said huskily.

They did not speak until they reached the school. As she got out of the car, Candy said coldly. “Thank you for taking me to see Anthony.”

Bill towered above her and grinned. “What perfect manners your mother taught you,” he teased. “Even when you want to cry, you are still polite.”

She lifted her head and glared up at him. Horribly aware that tears were very near. “I hate you, Bill Abbott,” she said quietly, and walked into the school.

The days passed in a strange mixture of emotions—one moment, Candy felt almost unbearably sorry for Andrew, the next she had to fight the desire to tell him to stand up to his sister . . . She longed to be alone with Andrew—and dreaded it the next moment. Would she be able to keep quiet? If she asked if the dreadful story of his parents’ death was true, he would know she had been discussing him. He would feel she was disloyal, did not trust him. He might even discover that Bill knew about the unofficial engagement . . .

It was some time before she realised that Andrew was avoiding her. Now he dictated his letters on the tape recorder—was always out of his study when she took the letters to be signed—she would find them later on her desk. Why was he avoiding her? Was he afraid that if his sister saw them together, she would guess the truth? Was he afraid he could not hide his love for Candy?

She was standing in the staff-room one day, staring out of the window and thinking about Andrew, when Bob suddenly put his hand on her shoulder, making her jump.

“Penny?” he said cheerfully.

She tried to smile, suddenly realising that these days Bob was always cheerful, always whistling or humming. “My thoughts are not worth it, Bob. Why are you always so jolly these days?”

“Near the end of the term—it is in sight at last,” he said and smiled at her. “And the prison doors will open.”

“Oh Bob—is school as bad as that?” she asked him, trying to smile.

His eyes were kind. “Isn’t it? You’re not looking so well. They overworking you?”

She laughed. “Slightly—”

She was glad then that someone else came into the room and she could slip away to her room quietly.

She did up a parcel of magazines for Dene and a book she thought Anthony might enjoy and wrote him a letter. Not long for what was there to say that would interest him?

She took the parcel to Matron and found her, for once, relaxed

in an easy chair, gazing out of the window thoughtfully. She looked puzzled as Candy asked her to give the package to Dr. Abbott and ask him to pass it on to the Testers.

"But you'll be seeing Bill yourself . . ." Matron said in a bewildered voice.

Candy's cheeks burned. "I don't expect so," she began and hastily changed it to: "I might not for I'm not always in my office when he looks in and I do want Anthony to get this soon . . ."

"Have you quarrelled with Bill?" Matron asked bluntly.

Candy felt uncomfortable. "Not exactly but . . . but we did have a few words and . . . and I'd rather not see him . . ." And perhaps he doesn't want to see me, she thought suddenly, after all, she had called him a liar. . . .

Matron stood up and put the package on a shelf. "I'll give it to him," she said and straightened the ornaments on the small cabinet, avoiding Candy's eyes as she added: "He is very fond of you." Her voice was kind. "In fact, more than a bit fond, I would say."

"Oh no, Matron," Candy said quickly and without thought. "He's going to marry Dene Tester."

"Dene Tester?" Matron echoed, staring at her, puzzled. "Whoever said so?"

Candy wished she had never mentioned it. It might be betraying a secret if she admitted that Anthony had told her. "Everyone—" she said vaguely.

"Then everyone is wrong—" Matron said flatly.

A timid knock on the door interrupted them and when Matron turned to open it, it revealed Molly Broom, her hand on her swollen cheek, eyes huge and unhappy.

"Toothache again?" Matron said briskly. "We'll have to fix a visit to the dentist, child, you can't go on like this . . ." Her raised eyebrows as she glanced at Candy said their unexpressed thought—that it was Molly's mother's place to see the child visited the dentist regularly—but what a mother! "Come along, Molly," Matron said in a kind but firm voice. "We'll fix it with some oil of cloves . . ." She set off down the corridor for the small dispensary.

Molly hesitated, looking at Candy wistfully. "Are you sick, too, Miss White?" she asked.

Startled, Candy said. "No, I'm all right, thank you, Molly. Why?"

"Molly . . ." Matron called impatiently. "Do you want . . ."

Molly gave a wild glance down the corridor and then looked at Candy. "Because you're so quiet and you never smile these days," she said and bolted down the corridor like a scared rabbit.

Rather shaken, Candy went to her bedroom and took a good look in the mirror. What she saw shocked her. Huge eyes with dark shadows beneath them. A mouth that drooped dismally at the corners. Pale skin—lank hair that looked as if it hadn't been brushed properly for ages. . . .

She must alter her appearance, force herself to be gay. . . .

As part of her new plan, she went to the staff-room later that afternoon. She was going to be very gay, very cheerful. Whatever happened no one—least of all Bill Abbott—must guess how unhappy she was. As she walked into the room, she was met by a gale of laughter. A crowd seemed to be collected round a particular couple, laughing, and talking loudly. As she joined them, Candy saw that it was Nancy, and Bob Robinson, both looking flushed, both smiling at one another.

Horace turned and saw Candy. "Just think, Candy. The school's pet wolf and our little Nancy . . ." he said, beaming.

Candy kissed the radiant girl. "How lovely, Nancy. I must have been blind. I never guessed. . . ."

"Neither did anyone else," Fabian said in a dry voice.

Candy turned to Bob. "I hope you'll both be very happy . . . I'm sure you will be . . ." she said, smiling at him.

He smiled back. "We will be."

When Candy could get Nancy alone for a second, she asked: "When did it happen? You might have told me. . . ."

Nancy blushed. "It all happened so quickly. You see . . . you see I'll admit I've always liked Bob very much but I never thought he would look at me. Then . . . then . . ." She smiled at Candy. "He seemed to like you so much and . . . and I was a bit jealous. You always enjoyed being together and had so much to talk about and . . ." She squeezed Candy's arm. "Then Bob began to talk to me more and when we went to the Reserve you practically ignored him and . . . and you went out with Bill Abbott and . . ." She laughed at Candy's startled look. "I know I was silly but you are so pretty . . . well . . . well . . . this afternoon we were talking and Bob said he had saved enough money and planned to give up teaching and try to paint for a living . . . and then he said he needed a model and how about me . . . and could I cook . . . and was I over twenty-one or must he go and ask my father for my hand in marriage . . ." she giggled happily. "I thought he was fooling . . . only then he kissed me and . . . and I knew he wasn't . . ." Her face was radiant. "But we wanted to keep it a secret for Miss Faulkner won't like it and . . ."

"What on earth has it got to do with her?" Candy demanded.

Nancy shrugged. "She won't like it . . ."

There was no hope of keeping it a secret! All through dinner, Bob and Nancy were teased and both looked as if they were floating on a cloud of happiness.

Next day when Candy went to breakfast, she found Nancy looking very pale but with two bright flags of colour in her cheeks.

"We have to leave right away . . ." Nancy told Candy, her voice shaking. "Miss Faulkner said . . . said the most terrible things." Nancy turned away but not before Candy had seen the tears in her eyes. "And they're not true . . ." Nancy said vigorously. "Bob isn't a wolf . . ." She rushed out of the room.

Unhappily Candy went to her office. She would miss Nancy. Besides it wasn't a nice way for the girl to be dismissed.

Miss Faulkner called her into her room and did not tell her to sit down. "Miss White—" Miss Faulkner's voice cracked with ice. "Did you know about this . . . this liaison with . . . Miss Boone and Mr. Robinson?"

"I only heard of the engagement last night, Miss Faulkner," Candy said stiffly, trying to keep hold on her quick temper.

"You had no idea? Heard no talk?" Miss Faulkner persisted.

Candy drew a deep breath. "I had no idea and that is the truth—" she said firmly and glared at Miss Faulkner, who looked a bit startled and said in a surprisingly mild voice:

"That will be all, thank you, Miss White . . ."

Back in her own office, Candy looked up the word *liaison* in the dictionary.

Liaison. Union or bond of union. Illicit union between a man and a woman . . . she read.

What a horrible word! She was on her feet, dictionary in hand, about to go in and tell Miss Faulkner she must not use such an

ugly word in connection with Nancy and Bob when she heard a car draw up outside.

Automatically she moved to the window to see who it was and a woman got out of a big black car and looked up at the building. A tall thin woman with a shock of white hair and a tired anxious face which lit up with a smile as she saw Candy at the window.

"Mummy—" Candy cried, excitedly.

She forgot everything else, almost tumbling out of the front door into her mother's arms. "Oh, Mummy—I'm so glad to see you . . ." she said, and never before had she meant those words so much.

Even as Candy released her mother, she saw from her mother's face that they were not alone. Turning her head, Candy saw Miss Faulkner standing in the doorway, looking regal and consciously gracious.

"Is this your mother, Miss White?" Miss Faulkner said, showing her teeth in a wide smile as she came to greet them. "Dr. Elisa White . . ." Miss Faulkner said almost proudly. "I am so pleased to meet you. My brother and I have been looking forward to this . . ."

Candy saw the very wary look in her mother's eyes, noticed the slight but instinctive withdrawal her mother had made even while she shook hands, and stifled a sigh. Miss Faulkner was her brother's worst enemy sometimes.

"Very nice of you to say so, Miss Faulkner," Candy's mother said briskly. "I had hoped there would be some hotel near here where I could stay for a few days." She smiled ruefully. "I had no idea you were so isolated."

"Of course you must stay here," Miss Faulkner insisted. "Please come inside. Is this your car?" She gave a quick glance of appraisal at the black Jaguar and the smartly clad African chauffeur waiting at attention.

Candy's mother laughed—a young amused laugh. "My goodness no . . ." she said. "Our car is a wee thing in comparison and it is in England. This belongs to a friend of mine who has lent it to me for this trip."

"The chauffeur can find accommodation in the location behind the school—" Miss Faulkner said stiffly as if she was not amused. "Please come inside . . ." She gave a smile without warmth as she glanced at Candy. "I think we can forget work while your mother is here, Miss White—" she said smoothly and turned to Candy's mother. "Your daughter is the most efficient secretary we have ever had," she said graciously, inclining her head slightly.

"I'm glad to hear that," Dr. White said but from the tone of her voice Candy knew that her mother did not like Miss Faulkner.

The 'guest room' proved to be a pleasant suite of rooms: bedroom, sitting-room and bathroom. While Candy's mother washed the dust of the journey off her and changed into a simple severe white linen suit, she asked stray questions and let drop odd comments.

"The school is bigger than I expected—" she said as she dried her hands on the thick fluffy towel. She glanced round the beautifully furnished room. "Plenty of money spent, I see. . . . Is Dr. Faulkner away? Oh, I see—he teaches . . . M'm . . ."

At last she was ready, her white hair combed into some vague resemblance of neatness, her eyes shrewd as she came to sit by her daughter.

"Now, tell me, Candy . . ." Dr. White said in as she looked at the now quiet girl who sat so stiffly on the edge of her chair. "Why

did you write and tell me you were so wonderfully happy—and yet you look so miserable?”

Candy hesitated, looking at her mother's warm compassionate face with troubled eyes as she debated whether to tell her or not. And then the words tumbled out of Candy's mouth. She would not have told her mother, risking her mother's impression of Miss Faulkner, but already Miss Faulkner with her sugary sweetness, her obvious fawning, had done the damage.

“Miss Faulkner's so *odd* . . .” Candy said. She told her mother about Nancy and Bob, about Miss Faulkner's angry accusations, her insistence that they leave the school immediately. “Just as if they had done something disgusting. It isn't fair . . .” Candy said indignantly, her cheeks flushed. “Nancy isn't like that—nor is Bob. They're both such nice people. You know how it is, Mummy. People will gossip so and things get exaggerated. Should Bob ever have to teach in a school again, this story might ruin his chances and . . .”

Her mother moved in her chair a little. Did she look relieved? What had she expected Candy to tell her? Dr. White's voice was mild as she spoke.

“I take it Miss Faulkner is not easy to work for—I gathered from your startled look that the charm just now was obviously put on for my benefit. Why, I don't know. I'm just a children's doctor. Poor by her standards.”

“And . . .” Candy stopped herself in time. “Her brother,” she went on, “thinks highly of you, Mummy.”

“How nice of him,” said her mother with a slightly rueful smile. “Tell me about him. Hasn't he any influence . . .”

“He does his best, Mummy,” Candy said quickly, “But his sister is . . .”

She paused. Dismayed. She had been going to say *delicate*—but Bill had said Miss Faulkner was as strong as a horse! “She is very difficult—” Candy finished and knew how weak it sounded, and that her mother had noticed the uneasy pause. “She disapproves of rock and roll and . . . oh, there are lots of little stupid irritating things. Andrew doesn't agree with her methods . . .” Candy talked swiftly, uncomfortably aware that she had called Andrew by his Christian name knowing that it was too late to do anything about it, now.

“Andrew . . .” her mother interrupted her, her face suddenly stern. “Do you call Dr. Faulkner *Andrew*?”

Candy swallowed and looked miserably at her mother.

“Yes,” she said and sighed. “We're engaged, Mummy . . .” As she spoke, Candy fumbled to undo the pin that kept her engagement ring pinned to her petticoat. “Only it is a secret . . .” she added, as she slipped the ring on her finger and held it out for her mother's inspection.

Candy's mother's face was expressionless as she surveyed the ring dutifully. She asked mildly: “Why is it a secret?”

“Because . . .” Candy began. Again she had to pause. Andrew had said it would upset Constance with the end of term so near and what not . . . but Bill had said that Andrew was scared to tell his sister. It was so difficult. Candy wriggled uncomfortably on the edge of the chair. “We are telling his sister in the holidays, Mummy, because she doesn't like to mix work and . . . and pleasure.”

Her mother looked at her. “Is she going to be pleased?”

They stared at one another for what seemed like an endless moment. Candy swallowed nervously. “I'm afraid she isn't . . .” She sought for the right words and began again slowly, staring down at

her clasped hands, afraid lest her eyes betray her fear and uncertainty. "You see, Andrew was four when his parents were . . . were murdered and Constance was eighteen and she . . . she took the place of his mother . . . and of his father, too, for she was all he had. I think she still looks on him as her child but he . . . he wants to break away from this school and start on his own. She doesn't want that. You see, she is a good organiser and handles the financial side but An—Andrew is the one who keeps the school together . . ." Even as she spoke, Candy heard her voice dying away as she wondered if that was true. Was it Andrew who kept the school together?

Candy's mother stubbed out her cigarette, rose and found a fresh packet and silently they lit their cigarettes. Candy felt disturbed—this was a sure sign that her mother was worried, for otherwise she rarely smoked.

"I heard Miss Faulkner was very possessive, Candy . . ." she said slowly. "When Dr. Faulkner was at university, she lived in the nearby village and apparently he lived at home and went back immediately after lectures. He never took part in any of the extra-curricular activities—or in any games, nor did he join any club. I thought it was a great pity but imagined he might be in poor health. It seems more probable that his sister disapproved. I heard . . ." she went on again, "That he is a charming, well-educated man."

A rush of relief flooded Candy. "He is, Mummy. I—I couldn't believe it when he said he loved me. It seemed too wonderful to be true . . . and then," she added, colouring as she spoke. "He calls me Comfort," she added shyly.

Her mother gave a small startled movement. Her face was concerned as she looked at Candy and suddenly she was stubbing out the newly lighted cigarette.

"So you are a comfort to him . . ." she said, each word dropping slowly into the quietness. "Is that what you want to be, Candy? A comfort to a man?"

Candy was grateful for the knock on the door that interrupted them. Seline, crisply smart in her starched blue frock and white apron, tiny white cap perched on black curls, handed a note. It was in Miss Faulkner's beautiful writing, asking Dr. White and her daughter to lunch with them in their own house.

"My brother is eager to make your acquaintance," Dr. White read aloud and looked at Candy. "I wonder why . . ." she added.

Candy's cheeks burned. "Well—you are going to be his mother-in-law . . ." she pointed out.

"H'm . . ." her mother said and wrote a short acceptance and gave the note back to Seline. "I suppose that could be the reason." Almost instantly she changed the conversation and talked of her lectures and her experiences so that it was suddenly time to go to lunch and Candy felt nervous as they walked down the drive in the blazing sunshine and her mother admired the garden.

Candy's hands were damp with fear as they went into the small, beautiful house but Andrew greeted them with exactly the right amount of friendliness and deference, and included Candy in it, calling her *Candace* openly, making it plain that he liked her very much. It was a pleasant meal and a genial atmosphere and as they ate the perfectly served meal of crayfish salad, followed by cold duck, Candy glanced round her curiously.

Afterwards Andrew showed them all over the school, behaving perfectly with just the right amount of modesty and pride, Candy noticed with a sick heart. Once, when he had the chance and her

mother was walking in front of them, Andrew gave Candy a quick significant smile, but most of the time he naturally devoted himself to her mother. He said he would arrange for her to dine with Candy in the staff dining-room and give her every opportunity to meet the staff.

"We are proud to have you with us," he said, bowing a little with a strange old-world grace to Dr. White. "I will see you tomorrow. . . ."

He left them to have tea with Matron and Mrs. Combie. The evening flashed by with Candy's mother seeming to enjoy meeting the staff, having long absorbing talks with each of them and when they went up to bed later, Candy saw from her mother's face that she was thoughtful and concerned, and deemed it a bad moment to discuss the important matter of a directorship with her.

After breakfast, Candy went straight to her mother's room, for Dr. White had gratefully accepted Mrs. Combie's suggestion of breakfast in bed.

Candy hurried into the room, smiling at her mother. "Well, Mummy," she said eagerly. "What do you think of it? Wouldn't you like to be one of the directors?"

Her mother put down the piece of toast in her hand and stared at Candy, her face startled. "Be a . . . a *what*, Candy?" she asked, amazed.

Candy sighed and could have kicked herself. She had never meant to ask her mother in that blunt way.

Curling up on the bottom of the bed, she eyed her mother warily, wondering what was the best approach.

"Now, Candy—" her mother said sharply, her eyes anxious. "What is this nonsense about being a director? A director of what . . .?"

Feeling subdued, Candy explained. "A director of the school. Andrew says it is very important to have the right names on the directors' board. You see, as a well-known specialist on children, you would . . ."

"Vouch for the school?" her mother asked. She drank her coffee quickly and put the cup on the saucer with a little noisy plop. "I couldn't do that, Candy," she went on crisply. "I disapprove strongly of the way the school is run," she finished flatly and busied herself pouring out a fresh cup of coffee.

Candy stared at her mother's bent head and absorbed face with dismay. "But you don't approve?" she almost wailed.

Her mother looked up and her face was stern. "I most certainly do not. I like most of the staff, though not all of them. I like Matron and Mrs. Combie but I dislike Miss Faulkner and distrust her brother . . ."

"Mummy . . ." Candy cried, sitting up stiffly, her eyes wide with dismay.

Her mother drank her coffee slowly and her voice softened as she went on. "I am sorry, darling, if it is a disappointment but I must speak the truth. I do not approve of the way the school is run for there are undercurrents of resentment. I can see the children are not happy for they sense the atmosphere at once. The staff resent Miss Faulkner's autocratic manner, consider her unreliable, know she would never support them in any trouble that might crop up. They know that she is not the slightest bit interested in the children, only in their parents' cheque books . . ." She paused and finished her coffee. "You do see that I must refuse, Candy? Whose idea was it

that I should be a director?" she asked mildly and then suddenly barked the question at Candy: "Was it Dr. Faulkner's?"

Candy stared at her.

She moved uneasily, sliding off the bed. "It was my idea," she said stoutly. "Then when I suggested it, Andrew jumped at it. He said it would help the school tremendously and then he could sell his share in it and we could start one on our own . . ."

"You'd prefer that?" her mother asked.

Candy twisted her hands together, her young face earnest. "Of course. Oh, Mummy, Andrew has had such an unhappy life and he needs me . . ."

"Candy," her mother said very slowly, "Have you thought about this enough? You're only twenty-one and he is in his mid-thirties. You need a man you can lean on, a man who will look after you. If you marry this man, you will be the prop, the one to lead. He is weak . . ." She paused and looked apologetic. "I don't mean to be rude to him or unkind. He cannot help it, being dominated from such an early age by a strong character like his sister. Candy—are you sure you want to marry him?" Her eyes were concerned as she looked at her only child.

Candy shivered for a second. Was she sure? Then she heard a deep vibrant voice saying softly: "*My Comfort—what would I do without you?*"

She lifted her chin. "Yes, I am sure—" she said, and shivered again.

Her mother slid out of bed. "Then I won't try to persuade you otherwise," she said cheerfully. "Now I'll have a quick bath and we can take the car and you can show me some of the beautiful countryside," she said lightly.

Candy stared at her and was conscious of dismay. "Mummy—" she said unhappily. "You couldn't change your mind about being a director?"

Her mother, busily creaming her face and wiping it with a tissue, an action that mildly surprised her daughter for normally she had no time for what she called 'beauty parlour business', looked startled.

"How can you ask me, Candy? It would be against my principles." She stared at Candy thoughtfully. "Candy—are you quite sure that is not the reason he wants to marry you?" she asked quietly and slipped past Candy, and into the bathroom.

Candy was still standing in the middle of the room when her mother came out of the bathroom. She felt unable to move, to think clearly. Somehow she forced herself to turn and say lightly: "I wish I could take you to see Bill."

"Bill?" her mother said. "Who is Bill—and why can't you?"

Candy sighed. "Bill Abbott is the doctor here. He's young and supposed to be brilliant but . . . It's his mother who is the snag . . ."

Her mother was dressing with her usual quick movements. "Have you quarrelled with him?"

Candy went to lean against the window, her head bent as she played with the tassels on the green curtain. "Not exactly quarrelled," she said in a troubled voice. "But he told me something that I said was a lie . . . and now . . ." Her voice tailed off.

Her mother brushed her mop of hair vigorously. "Why can't we go there?"

"There's something queer about Bill's mother," Candy explained as she looked up. "They never entertain, she never goes out, no one ever sees her . . ."

Her mother gave a noise suspiciously like a snort. "Probably

because she finds the people here boring. People invent gossip—make mountains out of molehills,” she said scornfully, zipping up her linen skirt.

Candy’s face was bright. “I never thought of that—she may be just an eccentric.” Then her face clouded as she remembered. “They say the Africans are terrified of her—they call her a white witch doctor . . .”

Her mother stared at her in dismay. “Surely you don’t believe such nonsense, Candy? I thought you had more sense.”

Candy laughed uneasily. “I wouldn’t believe it in England, Mummy, but up here . . .”

“It’ll be a good thing when the end of term comes,” her mother said briskly, making up her face quickly. “You need a complete change—most unhealthy atmosphere here. Now about this young man, Bill . . .”

“He wants to meet you,” Candy said, glad to change the subject. “He has several spastic children amongst his African patients and he wanted your advice if you could spare the time. I said I knew you would. The trouble is, I don’t like to drive up straight to his house. Without an invitation, I mean,” Candy said unhappily.

Her mother slipped on her linen coat and turned. “Personally I would say the best thing to do would be to drive there as if it was a normal household . . .” she began and paused as she saw the distress on the young unhappy face. “Telephone him, darling,” she added gently.

Candy looked at her watch. “I might just catch him—he has a surgery there early mornings . . .”

Bill was in! When he heard her voice on the telephone, he sounded delighted. “It is good of your mother,” he said in his normal friendly voice, just as if the quarrel had never occurred. “Now how can I . . .”

“My mother has a car here . . .”

“Good—that simplifies things,” Bill said crisply. “Could she meet me in Nsingsi? At the hotel. I’ll drive her to see my patients for it is a rough road to their homes. What time?”

Candy turned to ask her mother who was standing, waiting, a strange expression on her face.

“Any time, Candy,” she said. “We could start right away . . .”

So it was arranged. But Bill had said ‘. . . could *she* meet me . . .’ so Candy said she could stay behind, for they would want to talk shop and she would only be in the way. She said this all so eagerly and so earnestly but she still felt absurdly bereft and deserted when her mother accepted the suggestion and left her.

She was furiously attacking the pile of letters left on her desk by Miss Faulkner when Andrew walked in, his gown flapping. He came to stand by her side, his hands gripping her arms as he said in a hoarse whisper:

“I can’t stop, darling, but how goes it?”

Her face stiffened as she managed a smile. “All right . . .”

He gave her his usual brilliant smile but for once her heart did not seem to turn over.

“She does like me?” he asked and his eyes were bright and shining as she nodded and then he hurried out of the room again and Candy sat still, feeling sick with misery.

What had he meant? *How goes it?* was what he had said. Did he mean did mother like him as a prospective son-in-law . . . or was he thinking of the plan to ask her to be a director of the school.

It was a relief to escape from the tortured thoughts when her

mother returned. Going eagerly to meet her, Candy noticed how grim her mother looked—and she was suddenly sure that Bill must have told her about Andrew . . .

As soon as they were alone in her mother's rooms, Candy could contain herself no longer. "Bill told you about Andrew's nightmares," she said accusingly. "He had no right to . . ."

Her mother sat down rather suddenly on the bed, her hands on her squarely planted, white sailor-shaped hat. "What nightmares?" she asked bluntly.

Candy's hands flew to her own red cheeks. Why must she always blurt things out?

"What nightmares?" her mother asked. Taking off her coat, combing her hair, leading the way back to the beautifully furnished sitting-room, sitting by the window. "I had a most interesting morning," she went on, leaning on the sill, gazing at the glorious view. "He wanted me to stay to lunch but I wanted to get back to you for we haven't got so very long together . . ." she added, almost wistfully.

Candy's throat tightened for she had been thinking that all the morning and wishing she had gone into Nsingisi with her mother.

"The holidays will soon be here. Then I'll be with you," she said.

"But will you?" her mother asked, "Haven't you got to break the news to Miss Faulkner?"

Candy's mouth was dry. "I . . . I . . ."

Her mother glanced at her and then away again. "Bill is a nice young man," she said in a lighter tone. "I rather wonder you didn't fall in love with him."

"He's going to marry Dene Tester. She's a nurse, she lives at the Mission with her brother."

"Is he?" Candy's mother sounded surprised. "I got the impression that . . ."

"He's a confirmed bachelor?" Candy asked, with a little nervous laugh. "So did I but . . . but Dene is nursing her brother who is slowly dying and . . . and . . . and so they can't think or talk of marriage at the moment."

"I see . . ." Her mother took out her cigarette case and offered Candy one. "Now what is all this about nightmares?" she asked casually.

Candy looked at her in dismay. She had hoped her mother had forgotten the wretched word. Miserably she told her mother the whole story as Bill had told her, of Andrew's terrifying experience as a boy of four, of his dependence on Constance, his nightmares.

Her mother did not comment until Candy had finished. "I see . . ." She looked at her cigarette thoughtfully and changed the subject. "Have you never wondered about your father, Candy?" she asked.

Startled and relieved by the way the subject of nightmares had been so easily accepted, Candy said: "I've always wondered but it used to upset you so when I asked questions, so I stopped . . ."

Her mother smiled. "Bless you—it did upset me. It still does if I let it but . . ." She stubbed out her cigarette. "I was a medical student when I met your father—so was he. That was how it began. I'm one of those lucky people with a photographic memory and I also absorb knowledge. Poor Lionel, your father, didn't, and I don't think he could ever forgive me for the fact that I sailed through the exams that he always failed."

"He was an only son and lived with his widowed mother. I loved him very much—" Candy's mother was dreamy for a moment. "So

when he insisted we live with his mother, I agreed. I would have lived in a cave with him—" she laughed sadly.

"It was some time before I discovered why we lived with his mother, I thought it was because she needed him. I learned that he was the one who needed her. He could never make any decision without asking her advice—he never stepped outside the house without telling her where he was going . . ."

She lighted another cigarette, her face sad. "After a few years, I got restless. It had never worried me that his mother didn't like me, I was always busy and loved Lionel so that I accepted it. Then I discovered she was planting seeds of distrust in his mind . . . I was too friendly with the doctors—or I was neglecting him. He got very jealous and resented the fact that I soared ahead while he kept failing his exams."

She sighed and flicked the ash off her cigarette end. "It was a sad atmosphere and then she died in her sleep. I thought it might be a solution but it was the reverse." For a moment, Candy saw her mother's face crumple in distress but then her mother recovered and continued: "It was terrible to see a man go to pieces as he did. I moved us to a block of new flats—tried to rouse his interest. He stopped studying. I was qualified by then and working at a nearby hospital. He just sat at home, blaming me for everything. His failure to qualify—his mother's death—his unhappiness . . ." Candy's mother put her hand to her mouth to hide it as it quivered.

"We had a terrible quarrel, Candy. I know it was wrong of me. I lost my temper. I told him to be a man, stand on his own feet or I would leave him. Of course I didn't mean it . . ." She paused and swallowed.

"I had an urgent 'phone call in the middle of the quarrel. An emergency at the hospital. He—he begged me not to go. He needed me . . . I said it was my job, what kept us, that as a doctor I had no choice . . ."

She paused again and blew her nose, stubbing out her cigarette. "When I came back, he was dead. He had jumped out of the window," she said quietly.

Candy stared in horror at her mother. She longed to comfort her but what good were words?

"Your father wrote a letter before he died and posted it . . . yes, he posted it, to the coroner, saying I had driven him to his death. It was all most . . . most unpleasant . . ." she said slowly, looking at Candy and suddenly smiling. "And then I found I was going to have you. I think you saved my reason."

"Darling Mummy," Candy said, knowing it was ineffectual. "How absolutely ghastly."

Her mother smiled ruefully. "I won't say that it wasn't ghastly. It was. I still wonder if I should have stayed. But how could I? Someone was dying—so I went, and someone else died." She passed her hand over her eyes. "I knew that it would happen at some other time—it was inevitable. He was too weak—he had leant on his mother for too long." She leaned forward, clasping her hands, giving Candy a loving, searching look. "Darling, I've told you this because it looks as if you are doing what I did. Loving a man who is basically weak and dependent on someone else. If you wean him from his sister, he will cling to you like a limpet—will use you as a buffer between himself and every unpleasantness, just as your father did with me. If you ever try to throw off such an intolerable burden, he will blame you for everything, may even ruin your life

as your father nearly ruined mine. You may not be as lucky as I was—you may not have a little Candace to comfort you . . .”

Candy began to speak but her mother stopped her. “No, Candy darling, let me finish. I am not going to try to persuade you not to marry Andrew. If you truly love him, you will marry him whatever I say. But I do ask you to promise to be officially engaged—wear your ring openly and have everyone, including his sister, know of the engagement—for six months before you marry him . . .” Candy knelt by her mother’s side, holding her hands tightly, feeling strangely moved.

“Oh, I can promise that, Mummy.”

The gong boomed out noisily and Candy’s mother sighed. “We had better go down. I said we would lunch with the children.”

CHAPTER FIVE

It was hard—harder than it had ever been in her life—to say goodbye to her mother this time, Candy found.

She felt as if she was all alone in the world as she watched the car vanish in a cloud of dust and then she followed Miss Faulkner’s straight back into the school, and her heart sank and it was as if she was weeping inside her.

She awoke one morning to a wet misty day and saw that the brightly coloured flowers had bent under the night’s heavy downpour. She had to go to the store-room for fresh stationery and knew that Miss Faulkner and Andrew were driving to Nsingisi so she looked forward to a tranquil morning without fear, so she was surprised when as she was typing Andrew walked into her office.

She stared at him, stiff and tense, and saw that he was not looking at her but at the notes in his hand as he said very formally: “Miss White, when you have finished what you are doing, come along to my study. I have some notes to dictate . . .”

“Yes, sir,” Candy said meekly, knowing his voice was put on for the benefit of anyone who might be passing the open door. As she collected her things, she swallowed nervously. This was the moment she had dreaded. Yet why hadn’t he gone with his sister? She knew that they had an appointment with Mrs. Grace and Mr. Covington, the millionaire director, whose daughter had, Nancy had told her mischievously, been packed off to a finishing school in Switzerland because she was such a handful.

Her steps dragged as she went to Andrew’s study and he was busy when she went in and merely told her curtly to sit down.

She was so intent on studying his face that it startled her when he suddenly looked up and smiled.

“Well . . . ?” he said and there was repressed excitement in his voice.

Candy swallowed. “I thought—thought you’d gone to Nsingisi.”

He laughed. “I was supposed to go but I convinced Constance that she could handle the directors better without my support. She loves to feel she can do without me, you know. Well, Comfort . . .” he said and for once, the name left her feeling cold and afraid. “Did you sound your mother out about becoming a director?”

The dreaded moment had come. Her mouth was dry. “I’m . . . I’m sorry, Andrew, but she won’t be a director . . .” She clenched her hands fearfully.

He frowned, dark brows drawn together. “She won’t . . . ?” he echoed.

"No, I'm afraid she won't," Candy repeated.

She was startled when he rose, pulled her to her feet, and his voice was tender: "Don't look as if the end of the world has come. I had little hope that your mother would agree. It was your idea . . . remember?"

"I'm sorry . . ." she managed to say.

He put his arm round her and it was all she could do to stand still. "Don't be. She will change her mind when she knows we want to get married . . ." he said, pressing her head against his chest.

But I don't want her to change her mind . . . and I don't want to marry you, a voice seemed to scream inside her. For a moment, she thought she had spoken aloud. She closed her eyes tightly and stood passively as he tilted her chin and stooped to kiss her. And as he kissed her, she knew the truth. That she could never—*never* marry him . . .

And then he released her and gently pushed her into her chair, glancing as he did so at the door nervously.

"We must make a fresh plan—" he said gravely, going back to his chair and leaned forward.

A terrible weariness assailed Candy. Suddenly she felt too young for this situation. The sooner she got it over the better.

"Andrew . . ." she began desperately. "I'm sorry but I can't . . ."

The telephone bell shrilled. Impatiently. Imperatively.

Frowning a little, Andrew answered it. His face changed, he looked sullen. "But Constance, I told you . . . I'm sure you can convince them . . . No, I don't want to . . ." he spoke sulkily. "What? Oh, is she?" His voice changed, brightened. "I honestly don't think so, Constance . . . Oh, all right," he said moodily, "I'll drive in right away . . ."

Candy watched him, mesmerised with realisation of how right Bill had been. Andrew would always dance to the tune Constance called. She gave him one last compassionate glance and slipped out of the room and up to her own bedroom, where she could lock the door and stand, hands over eyes, as she realised that she still had not told him that she could not marry him.

As the days passed, she had no opportunity to be alone with Andrew and it seemed to her as if he was avoiding her.

One wet day she was typing, shivering despite the green cardigan she wore over her grey frock, thinking how chilly rainy days were in Africa, when Miss Faulkner came into the office, with a parcel.

"Miss White—I want you to take this to Nsingisi at once. Mrs. Grace is waiting for it," she said in her usual arrogant voice.

Candy stared at her and then at the rain-drenched windows. "But Miss Faulkner," she began. She had been told again and again how tricky it was driving on these muddy mountain roads, how even an experienced driver could have a nasty accident as a result of a skid. Miss Faulkner waited, her eyes like marbles, as Candy struggled on. "I've never driven in mud and . . ."

"Don't be childish, Miss White," Miss Faulkner said acidly. "There has to be a first time. There are chains on the car and if you drive carefully, you should have no difficulty. This is urgent. You do know where Mrs. Grace lives?"

Candy swallowed. "Yes but . . ." she began.

She was speaking to the air, for Miss Faulkner had put the parcel on the desk, and had vanished into her own room.

On her way to get ready, Candy paused at Mrs. Combie's room. But she was not there. Candy tried to find Matron, too, but she also seemed to have vanished. Candy hesitated. Perhaps Miss

Faulkner was right, and she was making a fuss about nothing. After all, you could never learn to drive in mud unless you tried . . .

She changed into blue slacks and a thick yellow pullover and then put her macintosh on top. One thing, she would be warm. The car had chains. She would take it slowly.

She hurried through the rain, sliding in the slushy mud of the path, to the garages, and the rain streamed off her macintosh and found its way down the back of her neck. It was a grey unpleasant day . . .

Matafeni, a garden-boy, was polishing the car in the garage.

"Where is Zacchary?" she asked the tall African who stood back as she got into the car. Zacchary was the chauffeur.

"He's very sick—" Matafeni said, touching his stomach and bending over as if in pain.

That was her last hope gone so Candy carefully backed the car out of the garage. It felt strange with the heavy chains on the wheels. She drove very slowly, with her heart in her mouth, for the roads were steep and treacherous when wet, and she could remember the tense expression on Andrew's face when he had once driven her to Nsingisi in heavy rain.

As she got nearer Nsingisi, the skies seemed to lighten and the rain slackened off. As she turned a U-turn, she could see the river below and that it was obviously in flood, tumbling and racing over the rocks, overflowing into the road either side. She slowed up—she would never get through the river.

As she dropped nervously down the steep road and the twists tortured the progress of the car, she wondered what she should do. Perhaps nearer the river there would be somewhere to turn . . . And then she reached a large sign that said *Detour* with an arrow pointing along a smaller road. With relief, she took this and found it was a longer way to Nsingisi but there was a high arched bridge crossing the swollen river and once past the bridge, she was in a valley and a watery sun came out and she saw that the road wound round the koppie where Bill lived.

The road ahead looked wide and smooth as if no traffic had passed over it recently but it was lined either side with high bush and turning a blind corner, she came on a herd of cattle. Standing in the middle of the road, their heads drooped miserably as they all huddled together as if to comfort one another—she was on them in a moment, there was not time to brake so she swerved to the side of the road and suddenly everything was taken out of her hands as the car spun round, flinging her from side to side of it—the last thing she was aware of was the car turning over, going off the side of the road, and then her head hit something hard and she knew no more . . .

Vaguely Candy was aware of a cool hand on her wrist and a compassionate voice repeating again and again:

"You are all right. Your face wasn't touched. You are quite all right."

Vaguely, too, she saw deep blue eyes and white hair.

Then she opened her eyes later and saw Bill's face—it was blurred and indistinct and she heard him say: "You're all right, Candy girl."

She kept floating off into black darkness, being spun round and round while her head throbbed painfully.

Once more she opened her eyes and saw her mother's grave, anxious face. "You're all right, darling," she said comfortingly.

At last she awoke to a normal world and saw that she was in

bed in a small room with palest grey walls and blue curtains and as she moved a thin woman got up from a chair by the open window. Staring at her, Candy remembered vaguely the white hair and deep blue eyes.

"Where am I?" Candy asked. She moved gingerly, finding to her surprise that she could move and was all in one piece. But she kept yawning and was afraid she would fall asleep at any moment.

"I'm Bill's mother—" the kind voice said. "You remember Bill? The doctor . . ."

Candy yawned and half-closed her eyes. "But you can't be Bill's mother," she said in the middle of another yawn. "They call you a white . . . witch doctor and you're not that . . ." Another yawn and her eyes were closed. "You're nice . . ." Candy murmured.

The next time she awoke she felt herself again and looked round with interest. Through the open window, she saw the sun shining and caught a glimpse of pink blossom against a blue sky.

"Hungry?" asked the little woman with the white hair.

Candy stared at her and remembered. "You're Bill's mother . . .?" she said in a surprised voice. "I am hungry . . ." she added, realising that she was. "Am I really all right?" she added.

Mrs. Abbott turned away and in a moment returned with a mirror. Candy had not meant quite that but she gazed curiously at the little peaked face she saw reflected, the enormous shadowed grey eyes and rumpled dark hair.

"I told you your face wasn't touched—that you were all right—" Mrs. Abbott said, almost triumphantly.

"That was the first thing I heard," Candy told her.

"I'm so glad," Mrs. Abbott replied, beaming. "It makes such a difference."

Soon she brought in a tray of delicious soup and then a light omelette.

Later Bill walked in, towering above the bed as he took Candy's wrist in his hand. His fair hair was ruffled. He told her she had slight concussion and severe bruising.

"It was very clever of you, Candy," he teased. "Choosing to skid right outside our gate. Mother was the first one on the scene and she sent for me. We decided not to move you," he said and there was a little silence, followed by Bill jumping up and saying that he really had no right to be sitting there, doing nothing. "Oh, and Anthony sent flowers," Bill said, smiling from the doorway. "He was on the telephone every day to know how you were getting on."

As each day passed, Candy felt stronger but she was not allowed to get out of bed yet awhile.

One day, Mrs. Abbott was sitting with her and they were drinking coffee when the older woman said suddenly: "So they call me the white witch doctor, do they?" She sounded amused but Candy's face flamed as she looked in dismay at her companion.

"Did . . . did I tell you?" she gasped.

Mrs. Abbott chuckled. "You were very dopey, my dear. Do they call me that because I don't mix with the outside world?" she asked.

Candy gulped down some coffee. "It . . . it was the servants."

Laughingly, Mrs. Abbott patted Candy's hand. "Candy you are an honest child," she said. "Look at me . . ." Candy obeyed, mystified. Suddenly Mrs. Abbott was very grave. "I want the truth, Candy. Does my face make you shrink away from me? Am I very hideous?"

Startled, and a bit frightened, Candy stared at the deep blue eyes,

the amused gentle mouth, the white hair and saw for the first time that Mrs. Abbott's left cheek was marked with thin white scar lines.

"I never noticed your scars before—" Candy said without thinking and then her hand flew to her mouth in swift dismay and her eyes widened with regret.

But Mrs. Abbott was smiling. "Thank you for being honest." Her face was radiant. "You never noticed them?" Candy shook her head and Mrs. Abbott beamed. "It just shows what a foolish old woman I have been . . . Candy—all my life I was a beauty. I was so proud of my face. You see, I was the only dunce in a family of six brilliant children and though my parents despaired of me often, they loved and were proud of my beauty," she said, her face dreamy for a moment. "I married a man who loved me for my beauty—and when he died, I used my beauty as a means of earning a living for myself and Bill. I used to demonstrate beauty preparations. All went well but not long after Bill qualified, I was in a car accident and when I recovered consciousness, I learned that I had lost my beauty. One side of my face was riddled with thick scars—they talked of plastic surgery but I would not listen. I wanted my old beauty back and that was something I could never get . . . Bill was sweet to me. He came here to work to give me a chance to recover. He was sure that in time . . . in time I would feel differently." Her face hardened. "But I didn't. I couldn't bear anyone to look at me . . . I was like a child. I used to cover my face with a veil when I spoke to the servants . . ." She chuckled. "No wonder they were scared of me. I never thought of that. I was just a conceited old woman. Thank God you came along to cure me. You are the first woman—white woman—I have spoken to for years. I had to forget myself when you lay there, crumpled and unconscious. Afterwards, I believed you were half-doped . . . or else too polite to look at me properly." She sighed again and went to the dressing-table, there to lean and gaze into the mirror. "I haven't looked at myself for so long . . . I forgot that time heals all . . ." She turned, her eyes bright with tears but she smiled. "Thank you, Candy . . ." she said and hurried from the room.

Next day Candy was allowed up and her legs felt absurdly shaky as Bill helped her to the sitting-room. She was very conscious of his arm around her—of his sympathetic help. But equally conscious that to Bill she was just a patient.

Bill's mother came in with her quick light step, a wary look on her face. "A letter for you, dear, from Miss Faulkner," she said in a strange voice. "Would you like me to . . . to . . .?"

Candy smiled and tried to hide her surprise. Did she look so weak?

"I expect it is a scolding for being away so long," she said lightly but as she turned the envelope over in her hands, she had a terrible fear that Andrew had told his sister and this letter was about them. . . .

"Call me if you need me," Mrs. Abbott said cryptically and vanished into the kitchen.

With a shiver of distaste, Candy slit open the envelope and pulled out the piece of paper. Suppose Andrew refused to release her, said he needed her, made a terrible scene?

"Owing to the extremely awkward situation your foolishness with the car has put us in," Candy read, "I have been forced to engage another secretary. An older woman and one far more suitable for the position so I have decided to retain her definitely. I shall not, therefore, be requiring your services any more and a cheque will be sent to you in settlement in due course . . ."

Candy lowered the letter and began to laugh. How typically Miss-Faulknerish!

She had not finished the letter so she read on:

"I feel certain you will share our delight at the news that my brother is to marry Miss Covington, the daughter of one of the directors. It should prove a most suitable marriage and will undoubtedly help considerably in the fulfilment of our plans for the school . . ."

Candy lowered the letter and stared down at it in amazement. A great wave of relief flooded her. She was free. Free. And then she was furious—disgusted with Andrew for his weakness, his cowardliness. Why hadn't he written to tell her? Had he asked his sister to break the news to her?

Her last day arrived and as the black Jaguar stood at the gate, Candy said goodbye to Bill and his mother.

The telephone bell shrilled at that moment and as Candy hesitated, dragging out the moment of farewell for as long as she could, they could hear Bill's concerned voice. When he came back, his face was drained of colour.

"Anthony—" he said curtly in answer to their enquiring looks. "I must go up. I've never heard Dene like that before. Quite hysterical." He held Candy's hands for a moment tightly, gazing down into her tear-filled eyes. "Don't grieve . . ." he said gently. "Anthony wouldn't have wished it. Remember, too, that everything gets better in time." He touched his mother's shoulder lightly. "May I bring Dene back with me?"

"Of course . . ." she said and then he was gone.

Candy drew a long deep breath. So that was the end of that . . . She turned almost blindly to Mrs. Abbott and was enfolded in a motherly embrace. "You must come and see us again," Mrs. Abbott said, patting Candy on the back. "Or I will come to Durban to see you." Her face brightened. "I'll do that, shall I?"

Candy's throat tightened as she kissed the older woman. "That would be lovely. I'll write to you. I don't know what our plans are yet . . ." she said and her eyes filled with tears. "I don't want to go," she said childishly.

"I know, dear . . ." Mrs. Abbott said sympathetically. "You have left your heart behind but . . ."

Candy turned on her almost fiercely. "I do wish you would believe me. I stopped loving Andrew ages ago. Once Bill opened my eyes and I saw Andrew as he really was, I stopped loving him though I felt sorry for him." She took a deep breath. "You will ask Bill to give him that little parcel for me? It's the ring . . ." She paused, remembering the pride and joy she had known when Andrew slipped it on her finger, and her constant sorrow because she had to hide it from the world's curious eyes.

Mrs. Abbott was staring at her strangely. "Why, dear, I do believe you really mean it."

"I do mean it," Candy said again as they walked to the waiting car. "I'm not saying I wasn't a bit upset because Andrew didn't tell me himself but knowing him, I can understand. And I know how I dreaded telling him that I wouldn't marry him . . ."

Mrs. Abbott closed the car door and looked through the window.

"What a pity it wasn't Bill you fell in love with," she said wistfully. "I'd have loved you for a daughter-in-law . . ."

Candy tried to smile. "I think it is just as well I didn't for that wouldn't have been much good either," she said wistfully. "He's going to marry Dene . . ."

"Dene?" Mrs. Abbott cried. "First I've heard of it."

Leaning out of the window and waving, Candy saw Mrs. Abbott's friendly loving face through a blur of tears and then she leant back in the corner of the car and kept her eyes closed, even as they drove through Nsingsi and all the beautiful mountains.

She had got over the first awful misery by the time they reached Durban but when she saw her mother waiting for her, the wretched tears returned.

"It's lovely to see you, darling," her mother began but her voice changed as she said: "Very tired?"

"I do feel a bit tired," Candy confessed. It was the coward's way out but she dreaded the thought of loving questions.

In an incredibly short time Candy was in bed, dutifully swallowing some tablets her mother gave her and finally she slipped into a deep blessed sleep.

When she awoke, she felt better. She turned as the door opened and her mother came in.

"Mummy—I'm sorry I was so difficult yesterday . . ." Candy said going to hug her mother.

"Darling, I could see how tired you were . . ." Her mother said, kissing her warmly. "And heartsore?" she asked gently for Candy had written to tell her that she had known she could never marry Andrew, she did not love him enough, and that he was going to marry Deborah Covington.

Candy shook her head. "No. Just relieved. There's so much to tell you . . ."

When her mother had gone, Candy wandered round the room aimlessly.

Her mother had suggested that if she was bored, she went for a run in the car—out to the Valley of a Thousand Hills, perhaps—and suddenly weary of her own company, Candy told the chauffeur she would want him in ten minutes.

She decided she would leave a note in her room for her mother in case she came back early. Passing through the crowded reception hall, Candy ached with the longing to get away from it all.

"Miss White . . . Miss White . . ." the receptionist came running after her breathlessly. "Telegram for you."

Who would be sending her a telegram, Candy wondered, as she ripped it open.

Her heart seemed to stand still as she read the words: "Bill hurt Love Lavina Abbott."

For a moment she felt she could not breathe—then she was hurrying to the lift—being wafted up seven floors to her room. She had forgotten her key but an African girl was cleaning the room so Candy could walk in. With a shaking hand, she scribbled a note.

"I have taken the car back to Nsingsi, Mummy. Forgive me but Bill is very ill."

She found a coat and almost fled from the room and down in the lift. Fortunately she had money in her handbag for petrol. . . .

But the chauffeur told her the tank was full. He showed no sign of surprise on his impassive dark face as she told him to take her back to Nsingsi and the house from which he had collected her.

It seemed an endless journey as she sat bolt upright, tense and coldly, staring blindly ahead. Bill hurt. How badly was he hurt? It must be grave for his mother to have wired. If only she had given

details . . . And why wire Candy? Dene would be there . . . But supposing there had been a car accident and Dene killed . . .

At last Nsingisi came into view and they dashed through the small town with a scattering of barking dogs and a few heads turning from the hotel stoep but Candy doubted if anyone recognised her at that speed, and if they did, what did it matter? All that mattered now was Bill . . .

Almost before the car stopped, she was out and stumbling down the path to the front door. Supposing she was too late . . . The door was ajar—this frightened her still more. She hurried inside—going to the sitting-room to find Mrs. Abbott first. . . .

Opening the door, she stood dead still, staring.

At Bill . . . At a Bill who looked every bit as startled as she felt, as he clumsily got to his feet and she saw that one of his ankles was bandaged.

Without stopping to think, Candy burst into tears and rushed forward. "You're all right and I thought you were dead . . ." she cried.

She was in his arms, clinging to him, and he was holding her close, saying over and over again: "Darling . . . darling . . . darling."

Her wet cheek against his, she tried to explain. "Your mother sent me a telegram. She said you were hurt . . ."

"I was—in a way . . ." he said and his voice was tender. "I sprained my ankle. . . ."

She gazed at him, tears balancing precariously on her long dark lashes. "I thought you were dead—dying . . ."

"Would it have mattered so much?" he asked gently.

"Oh, Bill . . ." She looked at him and it was all she could say. And then she remembered Dene, and was horrified. "Dene—" she said and tried to push him away from her.

"What about her?" he asked, holding her tightly. "She's at the Mission clearing up the papers before she leaves. . . ."

"But . . ." Candy stared at him in amazement. "You're going to marry her . . ."

"Are you quite mad?" Bill asked. "Who said I was?"

She stared at him as she told him. "Anthony told me you would take care of her and . . ."

Bill was laughing. "That doesn't mean marrying her . . ." he said and held her close to him. "I've got her a job with a new clinic on some important project in Rhodesia—something that she will enjoy . . ." He sobered and looked down at Candy's face. "I was never in love with Dene, Candy. Surely you knew that it was always you I loved. . . ."

She stared at him, her eyes widening. "You gave no sign. . . ."

He grinned ruefully. "You could only see Andrew . . ."

"I was a fool . . ." she said slowly, looking back at the past, amazed at herself.

A gentle sound at the door made them turn. Bill's mother was standing there, looking a little anxious.

"I'm sorry I frightened you so, Candy . . ." she began.

Candy slipped out of Bill's arms and went to hug Mrs. Abbott.

"You did frighten me . . ." she said warmly, "and I had a frantic journey here, expecting the worst . . . but it was worth it." Her face radiant, she smiled at the older woman. "What made you do it?"

Mrs. Abbott chuckled. "I saw plainly when you left yesterday that we were wrong and it was not Andrew you loved, but Bill . . . and then you had said that Bill was going to marry Dene—and I knew that Bill was in love with you . . ." she said a little breath-

lessly, "And it all seemed so hopeless—two people in love but too blind to see it and both so proud and so . . . and so when Bill sprained his ankle, it seemed like an answer to my problem, for I could honestly wire and say he was hurt and . . . and I knew that if you loved him as much as I thought you did . . ."

"I would come back?" Candy finished for her, laughing. "And I did."

"Yes—" Mrs. Abbott said triumphantly. "I knew that was the only way to convince Bill that you were not still in love with Andrew . . ."

Candy pushed her hair out of her eyes with a quick gesture and turned to Bill with a smile. "He's convinced now, I think. . . ."

"I most certainly am . . ." he said and limped toward her while his mother slid quietly out of the room, closing the door after her.

Bill took Candy in his arms and murmured against her soft responsive mouth. "I must be the luckiest man in the world. . . ."

"And I am the luckiest woman," Candy agreed fervently.

And then he kissed her and she knew that all her dreams had come true.

THE END

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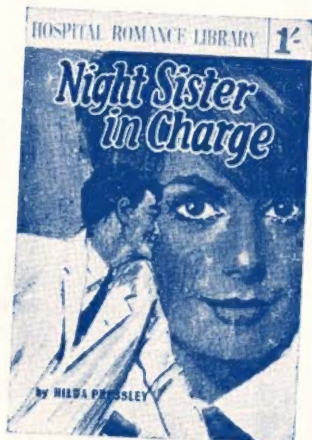
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